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Shenan- doah

Wyndham Lewis
(a new story)

Ezra Pound

Hugh Kenner

Marvin Mudrick

T. S. Eliot

Peter Russell

Roy Campbell

H. M. McLuhan

**Wyndham
Lewis
NUMBER**

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Shenandoah

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Summer-Autumn

Nos. 2-3

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CONTRIBUTORS

WYNDHAM LEWIS reports that he has finished the two books following the *Childermass* (*The Third City* and *Malign Fiesta*), and that the entire work will be published by Methuen. *Childermass* was broadcast as a radio play last year by the BBC, and Mr. Lewis is at present getting *The Third City* ready for them.

HUGH KENNER, who frequently publishes essays on the important moderns, will have a piece on Lewis's major novels in an early *Hudson Review*.

MARVIN MUDRICK is the author of *Jane Austin: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton, 1952).

T. S. ELIOT'S new verse comedy, *The Confidential Clerk*, will first be performed at the Edinburgh Festival this summer.

PETER RUSSELL is the editor and publisher of *Nine*.

ROY CAMPBELL, distinguished English translator, poet, and critic, will begin a lecture tour in the United States this Fall. Mr. Campbell resides in Portugal.

HERBERT MARSHALL McLUHAN'S study of popular culture, *The Mechanical Bride*, is reviewed in this issue. Mr. McLuhan arranged for the Lewis reproductions which follow his essay.

M. T. STAMPALIA is a graphic artist who lives in Richmond. Some of his etchings are included in a current exhibit at the Valentine Museum in that city.

EDWIN WATKINS, poet and classicist, lives near a woods in Richmond. He recently received the *Kenyon Review* fellowship in poetry.

RICHARD THORMAN lives in Alexandria, Virginia. The poem in this issue is his first published work.

ANTHONY HARRIGAN, who lives in Charleston, South Carolina, is preparing a book on John Randolph of Roanoke.

JAMES MERRILL published *First Poems* in 1951, and appears frequently in European and American literary reviews.

DONALD DAVIE, a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, is the author of *The Purity of Diction in English Verse* (Chatto and Wyndus, 1952). The essay on Landor is his first American publication.

GEORGE HEMPHILL has published critical essays in *The Kenyon Review* and poems in *The Quarterly Review of Literature*.

EZRA POUND'S collection of critical essays (edited by Mr. Eliot) and translations (edited by Mr. Kenner) will appear in the near future.

MARIANNE MOORE once taught school on an Indian reservation, where one of her most celebrated students was the late Jim Thorpe.

THOMAS H. CARTER, present editor of this magazine, wishes it made clear that after this issue he will have absolutely no connection with *Shennandoah*.



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Shenandoah

Vol. IV

Summer-Autumn

Nos. 2-3

Wyndham Lewis

THE REBELLIOUS PATIENT

It had been a great Winter. It had not allowed anyone in England to be warm, for however short a time, since it began in October. Until January was passing into February, it had contented itself with low temperatures, but then it began to blow. The Atlantic has waves which are loftier than any cliff, but it does not often show them. However, a ferry steamer called the *Princess Victoria*, which ran uneventfully between Stranraer, Scotland, and Belfast, Ireland, came out as usual into Atlantic waters on January 31st, to effect the routine crossing to Ireland. The moment she did so the blowing began. She found herself in the middle of waves greater than had ever been seen before by people who had looked up at waves all over the world. The top part of the ship slid away from the underpart, and they sank separately. The captain went under the waves stiff-armed and steely-eyed at the salute upon his bridge; practically all the passengers, with a mass of automobiles, sank higgledy-piggledy, rushing down among the fishes to the shocked surprise of the public. Was it the fault of the ship? Or was the Winter too violent for the scale of precautions against Nature which is usually found adequate by man? It was an un-British wind which had blown at that spot, out of the mouth of a Winter which turned out to be a dragon.

The outraged British were getting ready to set up a Committee of some kind to investigate the causes of the loss of the *Princess Victoria*, when the mad Winter blew again, but on the other side of England. The results were startling; the English felt at first that their eastern silhouette was being re-drawn. However, a national effort was put forth, and all of that crazy artificial outline which we have always regarded as solid was stuck together again, with

sandbags, mudbags, and bits of wood; people returned to their saturated houses, and life was resumed in places where it was not safe to live, and the atlas-draughtsman continued to draw England's eastern outline as he had always done in the past.

In the last days of February, now that the inhabitants of these Islands knew what kind of a Winter it was which they still had to cope with, there were some who wondered how they had managed to get through it. Mr. Wooton Park had battled his way through this epic Winter. Living, as he did, in London, he had breathed as little as possible those fogs which, on analysis, were found to have attained an unprecedented seven per cent of poisonous matter; he had done his best to keep warm, spending more on gas than he did on food. Then on the twenty-third of February, 1953, he surrendered himself to influenza. He sneezed and shivered, and crept into bed. Dismally he watched his wife—a pretentiously dynamic blonde—moving vigorously about, as if influenza never visited her. She had forgotten the dark days of Christmas, when he had withstood contagion.

March came in like a lamb; the influenza disappeared, but it left toxins all over Mr. Park's body. In turn, phantoms of all the complaints he had suffered from in his life paraded. He smiled bitterly as all his remaining teeth started to ache; his bronchial tract threatened to repeat the horrors of twenty years before. He seemed to be his fairly-healthy self again, when on March 26th he had a plain luncheon at two o'clock, and then suddenly, at five o'clock, after his first cup of tea, he felt nausea, and going to the bathroom he was sick. His entire luncheon was violently thrown up. Following that, for three hours, he was vomiting a little and then attempting to vomit. By eight o'clock, alarmed and fatigued, he fell asleep.

Everything passed off quietly after that. A good night was followed by a peaceful day. He went out to lunch without taking any precautions, he ate and drank as usual; and so on until two o'clock the next day. Then, twenty minutes after he had finished lunch, he vomited in the intact way he had the first time, only very much sooner after eating. The retching after this was slight; but Mr.

Park was thoroughly alarmed. And when Mr. Park was alarmed he would telephone to a doctor, and a visit from the same ensued. Since the war the doctor's name had been Plunkett. But this rather bubbling Irish physician had displeased them, or to be more accurate, Mr. Park's wife, the last time he had come. So another general practitioner had to be found. In London, and of course elsewhere, since the National Health Act and the triumph of State Medicine, the *private* doctor was a luxury which had to be carefully hunted for. In a working class district, or a very seedy one, he was probably non-existent. In recently fashionable neighborhoods you would not have to look far for a private doctor. Where the Parks lived, to find a reasonably good G.P. was now very difficult. Attempts to locate one in all directions had failed.

So it was one thing to indulge in a spiteful resolve to change one's doctor, and it was quite another thing to have a new one. It was an anachronistic gesture, in fact, to show, or to *feel* displeasure with a medical man, if you had one. Needless to say, it was equally anachronistic for the few private doctors who remained to indulge their tempers. But Plunkett was the only doctor left on Rotting Hill, and he was aware of this fact. This old Irishman snarlingly refused to be a State-doctor, to be responsible for three thousand patients, mostly slum dwelling, at a salary he did not like the look of, any more than the prospect of working five times as hard. He preferred to stop where he was, among the impoverished middle class, daily less able to pay him one pound to come and see them—with perhaps a couple of dozen seedy old persons, with Dr. Plunkett as their only remaining extravagance. This situation did not improve the doctor's temper and, being called in to see Mrs. Park (herself in no very good mood, because of her inflamed tonsils), there had been an unexpected collision.

But a friend had told them that, in a district a mile and a half to the west of Rotting Hill, there was a private doctor still functioning. Mr. Park now sat for some minutes struggling with his disinclination to take a step which was, however, necessary. He felt it was his wife's fault as much as it was old Plunkett's not to restrain an ancestral disposition. He took a reporter's notebook from

his pocket, in which he had scribbled Dr. Musgrave, BOL. 7386. A rather disagreeable expression on his face, he went over to the telephone and dialled this number. It rang for a little too long for a proper doctor's house. The bell stopped ringing, and he found himself in contact with an unexpected woman, the doctor's wife no doubt. She spoke of the doctor as if he could certainly be found, but that it could not be done in any routine way. Her voice was strong and her large rigid words pressed against him as do the railings of a park encountered in a moment of intoxication. What was this mad woman concealing? Did her husband now combine the calling of doctor of medicine with that of apothecary, or even plumber? She said that Mr. Park might ring at six; that she could not say whether the doctor would be back. As it was four o'clock in the afternoon, it seemed unlikely that the doctor would come to see him that day.

Mr. Park had been living on biscuits and orange juice for twenty-four hours. He returned to the place where he had been working, extremely discouraged. Who had that woman reminded him of? Mrs. Doom in the radio programme?—No, not that lady, but one of the species to which she belonged.

Mr. Park picked up a book which he was reading for a publisher, but he had not read for more than five minutes when his telephone rang. It was Dr. Musgrave. He sounded like a doctor. He appeared very ready to come at once. So Mr. Park went over to an armchair, lighted a cigarette, and sat rehearsing the account of the misdeeds of his stomach.

With an extraordinary expedition Dr. Musgrave arrived. What on earth had prompted Mrs. Musgrave to describe this man as elusive? Far from being that, he was sudden as an Arabian Night's Djinn.

There was a movement in the hall, the door opened, without lifting her hand from the door handle the still very handsome Mrs. Park smiled in the doctor.

Dr. Musgrave entered briskly with an 18th Century prance, and a small *ancien régime* smile which he retained throughout the interview. Mr. Park was prejudiced against men whose faces

reminded one of the weasel, but he invited this one to sit near him, and began to tell him about his unexpected sickness. The doctor produced his case-book and said "What is your age, Mr. Wooton Park?"

Mr. Park told him; the doctor repeated "59 and five months," and he wrote this down in his book. Mr. Park noticed that henceforth he occasionally addressed him as "Sir," though certainly not more than ten years lay between them.

"You are very pale, Mr. Park," the doctor said, as he felt his pulse.

"I am pale," Mr. Park agreed. "But I am not feeling very well. Also, if you sat in this room so unremittingly as I do, you would be pale also."

"Yes, but it is not so much the skin as the membrane that is indicative . . ."

He touched the patient's mouth with the tips of his nails. "Do you mind if I examine your eyes?" The doctor pulled down Mr. Park's lower lid. "Yes. What I really want to see is the *back* of your eyes. That is all-important."

"Good gracious me," protested the patient. "Do you propose to remove my eyes?"

The doctor sneered reassuringly. "Oh no, not that—all I want to do is . . . to . . ." He pulled up the upper lid as he had pulled down the lower one. It was obvious he had not been able to see "the back of the eyes." What was this fellow doing, the patient thought. He shook him off.

Still with his small smile, the doctor returned to his chair and took out his case-book, or should it be called a field-book?

At this point the two men, patient and doctor, looked at one another.

The most remarkable thing about the doctor was his smartness. To be wearing a new suit of clothes in England 1953 is prejudicial to the wearer, and especially so if he successfully passes himself off as *always* possessed of new clothes. If a suit is smart and expensive-looking it marks the wearer down as a *spiv*. The doctor's outfit was dark—discreet as to colour, but its unescapable newness

was a very unpleasant oddity. All that Mr. Park said to himself was that he would have liked the doctor better if he had not disguised himself.

The doctor, on his side, was favorably impressed by the furnishings of the Park home. Mr. Park sounded like public school and university. But as the two men looked at one another each saw in the other a dying class.

In Mr. Park's relation with his publisher he knew that everyone employed by that business man, except himself, had a union behind him, which pushed his salary up steadily and brutally, the printer and the binder having salaries worthy of the vital part played by those experts. Mr. Park was very conscious of his helplessness—he longed to have ten thousand men behind him. This doctor who did not work for the Welfare State, and this bookman who lived outside of the Trade Union structure, were absurdities, and they knew it. Dr. Musgrave seemed to be smiling at himself, and at what he was trying to do. He smiled hard as he said to Mr. Park "You are very anaemic."

But Mr. Park, frightened by his unaccountable vomiting, was losing patience.

"What I called you in for, Dr. Musgrave, was to find out what my stomach was doing," was what he said.

Smiling as ever, Doctor Musgrave answered, "Yes, that is what I am trying to find out, sir. Your anaemic condition *must* be attended to. The moment I saw you I was struck by your pallor. Have you ever had a blood count?"

"Oh yes, hundreds of times."

Dr. Musgrave stiffened, and looked very knowing, smiling like mad. "But *lately*, sir, not quite lately? I must take a little blood from you—not now, not now," he hastened to add, as the patient's impatience was becoming so uncomfortably noticeable. "Tomorrow perhaps. I must find out whether you have *pernicious* anaemia, as it is called (I believe you have), or whether it is ordinary anaemia."

Mr. Park was frowning heavily at him. From the time the doctor had mentioned the blood count, he knew what was happening.

Evidently this professional man took him for a simpleton. A little sickness now and then was medically a bagatelle—two, or with luck, three visits; two or three pounds. If a scare about anaemia could be planted in the patient, liver injections and all sorts of lucrative things might ensue. Dr. Musgrave was so captivated by the prospects of the anaemia, that he had quite forgotten about the vomiting.

Looking at Mr. Park's steady frown, the doctor exclaimed "The odd thing is that pernicious anaemia is easily cured—eradicated completely. I hope yours is pernicious anaemia! Ordinary anaemia is by no means so easy to deal with."

"Really." Mr. Park spoke at last. "May I recall you to my vomiting."

Dr. Musgrave slightly started. "Was there any blood?"

"No blood," the patient answered. "Just the whole of my lunch in the pan."

"Yes. Well, you must get a tin of Glucose from the chemist. This you must put on fruit. Just milk, and a little weak tea, for a few days."

"You do not think it is anything of consequence?"

The doctor shook his head. "No. You have no fever. It is not so serious as you seem to have thought." The doctor rose, as his patient had risen. "I will come tomorrow morning."

"Very well," said Mr. Park.

"Then I will bring a bottle, and I will extract a little blood. I do assure you, sir, you will feel an entirely different man when your anaemia has been dealt with. Your lips are practically the same colour as your skin."

Mr. Park smiled back engimatically.

The doctor took his bag off a chair. "Little and often," he chanted. "Remember, no *meals*. Snacks and sips, sir." He stopped. "I had quite forgotten to ask you, sir. You have, I suppose, some doctor of your own . . . in this neighborhood . . . ?"

"Yes. Since the war we have been accustomed to take our complaints to a certain general practitioner."

"I hope you will excuse me, Mr. Park, if I ask if it happened to be Dr. Orpington?"

The patient roughly shook his head.

"Then," as it were absentmindedly, the doctor continued, "ahum . . . let me see . . . there is Dr. Ward, and Dr. Widows—though I am not sure that he is still there. And quite near to you there *was* a doctor, what was his name . . . ? Let me see—Shingleton."

Mr. Park walked to the door, opened it, and allowed the brown handle to rest in his hand.

The doctor sniggered, picked his bag up, and as he moved towards the door hurriedly spoke half-to-himself, "I cannot remember. But if it were Dr. Orpington . . . well we work *very* close together. You understand don't you why I stressed this. It is so awkward if the patient . . ."

"Of course—with such *close* colleagues."

His wife was smiling as the doctor's smile disappeared, and the front door banged.

"You nearly pushed that little doctor out of the front door, Wooton," his wife said. "Why did you treat him like that?"

Mr. Park came back to his wife. "Because he had insulted me," he said.

"Insulted you!"

"Yes, he treated me as a fool. Is my face devoid of intelligence?"

Mr. Park described the interview. She laughed. "Why didn't you explain to him that you were not entirely asinine?" she asked.

"Because I think he is demented. Economic worries. The poor chap probably bought that suit on the hire purchase, and he can't get the money to pay the first installment. You notice the way he smiled? He is at his wits' end how to get five pounds that is due."

Clara Park laughed. "How awful. The worst of it is that quite likely that is true."

"The other day I read of a doctor, whose practice was in some out-of-the-way place, who shot himself. No woman, the report said, had had a child for nearly a year. And people walked past his house sneezing and blowing their noses. There was an influenza epidemic, but only the old people came near him."

They laughed at the luckless doctor, but Mrs. Park said "Why did that doctor not become a State-doctor?"

"Some of these fellows are romantic. They say that the National Health Act means the end of medicine, as I suppose it does. It is impossible to attend properly to the patient. You are forbidden to prescribe the necessary medicines. The young doctor is as bored as he is baffled."

Park's wife shrugged her shoulders. "I know. Well, what about this pathetic, smiling doctor? Is he coming any more?"

They had sat down in the living room. Mr. Park rose. "He said 'Tomorrow'."

The next morning at breakfast Mr. Park informed his wife that he had a plan. When asked what his plan was he was secretive. "I will humanise this smiling weasel," was all that he would say.

Dr. Musgrave made his appearance about eleven. When the doctor entered Mr. Park's room his patient sat at a desk, his hair ruffled, his eye lively. The chaos of the desk had a pattern, no doubt, the secret of which was Mr. Park's. But the books and papers looked as untidy as the man who sat in front of them. He rose from among these books and papers with an energetic noise and crossed the room to greet the doctor with an open friendly smile.

"Ah, I met a friend of yours yesterday," he said, unexpectedly grasping his hand. As he was almost twice the size of the doctor, this *mise-en-scène*, this burly activity, tended to break up the "patient-doctor" relationship; or, since the doctor's professional manner was so developed, it seemed to give him a new patient. Dr. Musgrave was defensively stiff, that is how he reacted—he attempted to adjust the balance in that manner, as if to say, "Very well, you be less the patient, I become more the doctor."

"Someone I know?" he began asking, brightly and stiffly, with an intensification of his smile. "Who could that be, I wonder?"

"Someone who has known you a long time," Mr. Park said impressively.

"Oh indeed. A long time—I wonder how long that means? A 'long time' can be ever so long, or quite a short time."

"I think you would regard this as really *long*," Mr. Park said a little portentously. He sat down abruptly, and the doctor carefully lowered himself into a chair. "I learned, to my distress—that things had not been going any too well with you; in fact—I do hope you won't mind my referring to this—I understand that, owing to the changes, the economic changes since the war, the National Health Act and so on, you had become very hard up. I do hope I am not embarrassing you. It is of course, in one degree or another, the same with all of us."

Dr. Musgrave had coloured. "Hard up? Hard up? Yes indeed. Who isn't? But" (urgently and a little angrily) "who was your informant Mr. Park? Was it a woman? No? Well, who the devil was it?"

"It was a person who *likes* you. That is all I can say. A well-wisher." And Mr. Park looked at him earnestly.

"I do not think, said the doctor with asperity, "that a *well-wisher* would discuss my private affairs with a stranger."

"Ah," cried Mr. Park. "But this was *not* a stranger, but a great friend of mine too."

Dr. Musgrave's little smile aquired an uncomfortable twist. "I see," he said. "It is probably a woman."

"Now look here, doctor, I am jolly sorry to hear how badly you have been hit. The way the professional classes are being treated is vile. I wish I had been born a coal miner. Ah well, I had intended to ask you, however, whether you were actually hard pressed at this moment?"

The doctor had been looking at the ground. These words had stolen into his ear as if he had been reading a letter. He had not raised his eyes to make contact with reality—the big stern face in front of him. But this sympathy which was offered him was that of a *friend* . . . a mysterious woman—who could it be? And then, something was very near the surface with him. He suddenly found himself allowing it to break out and show itself. Why not? Caution, like saving, was out-of-date.

"I am up against it, Mr. Park," the doctor said, looking up and flushing. "There is no reason why I should not tell you. The

neighborhood in which I have my practice has degenerated very rapidly since the war. A great many negroes have established themselves in one part, and the foreign element, mostly refugees, I think, is everywhere apparent. On top of that came the National Health Act."

"I see. Under the circumstances I can see how that might easily put your nose out of joint."

"I don't know about my nose," said the doctor, with a sort of snorting little laugh. "But what with old Orpington, and he really has most of the practice that is left, and a National Health man who still keeps a few of his patients, I am in a terrible position. If it were not for my wife, I would apply for an appointment under the Health Act. As it is, I do what I can."

"I can see how diabolically difficult it must be for you," Mr. Park commiserated: "I don't see how you manage... well, even to *dress* as you would wish, to pay the sweep, the plumber, the gardener, the window-cleaner. It must be frightful."

"Well, you speak of dress. It is my wife who compelled me to buy these clothes in which I stand—or rather sit." And he gave a slight snort. "One of my few regular patients is a lady of title. My clothes had certainly become very shabby. But what does that matter today? However, my wife insisted that I should go in for a new suit, because of this Dowager Lady So and So; although her account annually never reaches the sum of... well, of twenty pounds."

"I say, that's not much."

"I know, the lady in question is a careful woman. But I told you all this to illustrate the difficulties. When you are married, Mr. Park..."

"Ah yes, doctor, I know only too well. The suits of clothes I have bought because my wife insisted! But today I am damned if I would do it, however much she badgers me. Recently my tailor has come down, has *come down*, mark you, to forty pounds an ordinary suit. Why, I have not got that sum. I should have to pay it by *installments*."

The doctor hesitated a moment. Then he confided, "Well,

as a matter of fact, I bought these . . . garments" (contemptuously) "by hire purchase of all absurdities. And I am three months in arrears with the last installment."

"Well, look here doctor, what you have told me distresses me very much. I am afraid I cannot help you." He rose and went over to his desk, took a card out of a drawer, and returned to his chair, handing the card to the doctor. "These gentlemen often favour me with their attention, at least they send their cards. They have me down in some list of householders. They believe I am the sort of person who might be likely to wish to visit them."

Dr. Musgrave remained gazing at the card, on which was written: *BATTENBORO & LEVISON. Accommodation. No Security Demanded.* Then came the address.

"These are moneylenders," he said.

"That is what they are. I have never had to avail myself of their services," Mr. Park confessed, smiling broadly. "But I am sure that a well-heeled young doctor, with a charming smile, might be well received by them."

There was a silence. The patient noticed that the doctor's smile no longer was there, and at the same time he was able to note why that smile never left the doctor's face. Without it he looked very weaselish.

The silence continued. It was a rather brutal silence on Mr. Park's side; a silence of gradual awakening upon that of the doctor. With his head bowed, the latter sat painfully realizing what had happened to him. He was also adjusting himself to go into action—to tell this man he was a cad, *or*, silently to pick up his hat and bag and leave the house.

"Or would you like me to write to Messrs. Battenboro & Levison and to say that (without incurring any responsibility of course) I recommended a young doctor to them, in temporary need of their services—whose professional qualifications were high, but who . . . oh, you know the sort of thing. Would you like me to do that, doctor?"

These words were heartily barked out, and the doctor imperceptibly shrank as he listened to them. Without changing his po-

sition he replied. "It is very kind of you. No, sir, do not give yourself the trouble."

There was another silence. The doctor was still collecting his wits, and thinking what action he should take. But instinctively he lifted his eyes to re-examine with a fresh—an enlightened—eye, this abominable patient.

Mr. Park was sitting squarely and stiffly, leaning a little towards him. His tongue protruded.

"We have not scrutinized my tongue as yet," said Mr. Park. "Is my tongue pernicious, doctor, or just an ordinary tongue?"

A disagreeable sneer crept on to the doctor's face. The tongue had settled it—he now knew the line to take.

"You can put your tongue away, Mr. Park. It is nothing to be proud of."

He stood up. "I did not know you were a queer gentleman. How long have you been like this? Have you consulted anyone?"

Mr. Park laughed—a dangerous laugh which caused the doctor's sneer to fade a little.

"The vomiting was a blind, Dr. Musgrave. But you never gave me time to come to the point. You evidently have routine ways of extracting money from people. *Anaemia* is one. You came, politely prancing and smiling, into the room, and began talking about my pallor, you remember. I had no opportunity of speaking about my sickness, much less about my lunacy, which takes the form of putting doctors in their places when they take me for a sucker."

Mr. Park paused, to allow this shaft sufficient time to push its way into the doctor's inelastic intelligence.

"I am afraid, Mr. Park..." the doctor had risen and was beginning to step in the direction of the door.

Mr. Park moved quickly, and intercepted the doctor. "I am afraid, doctor, you will have to listen this time to what your patient has to say. I was rather scared about that severe vomiting. I called you in. But your acute indigence, and, if you will allow me to say so, your defective intelligence causes you to make a nuisance of yourself. You insulted me, Dr. Musgrave. You acted

toward me as if I were a prize fool. I have retaliated. That is all."

Mr. Park returned to where he had been standing before he had intercepted the doctor.

Dr. Musgrave, as if blowing something out, emitted a short sneering laugh. "You are a strange fellow, Mr. Park," he said. "I am sorry you resented so much my remarks about your anaemia, but you are very unwise to neglect it. Pernicious anaemia . . ."

"Yes, yes."

"You will be the sufferer if you do not take the necessary steps."

Quickly assuming a laughing, forgive-and-forget air, the doctor put his bag upon the table, opened it, and proceeded to address expansively the now seated patient. "Why not let me, as we originally intended, carry away a few drops of your blood, and, after I have received the analysis, let me put you right? I am not at all a bad doctor, however easy I may be to hoax."

Mr. Park sprang up. "Close that bag and be off! I have wasted enough time today—Come along. Be quick. I have to get all this copy back by the five o'clock mail."

As Dr. Musgrave left the house his patient said, "This was not a professional visit. You just stepped in to see a friend."

Ezra Pound

ON WYNDHAM LEWIS

I believe that Mr. Wyndham Lewis is a very great master of design; that he has brought into our art new units of design and new manners of organization. I think that his series "Timon" is a great work. I think he is the most articulate expression of my own decade. If you ask me what his "Timon" means, I can reply by asking you what the old play means. For me his designs are a creation on the same *motif*. That *motif* is the fury of intelligence baffled and shut in by circumjacent stupidity. It is an emotional *motif*. Mr. Lewis's painting is nearly always emotional.

—*Fortnightly Review*, 1914

I am FOR Mr. Lewis, even when he is wrong, and I am against the abominable public and race amongst which he lives, whether they are cursing him for his merits or praising him for irrelevant reasons.

I believe that all large mammals shd. be preserved.

* * *

It is of inestimable value that there be men who receive things in a modality different from one's own; who correlate things one would not oneself have correlated. The richness of any given period depends largely upon the number and strength of such men.

—*The Exile*, IV, 1928

A volcanic and disordered mind like Wyndham Lewis's is of great value, especially in a dead, and for the most part rotted, milieu. The curse of England is fugg. A great energy like that of Lewis is beyond price in such a suffocated nation; something might come of disorder created by Lewis.

—*Guide to Kulchur*, 1938

Wyndham Lewis, the man who was wrong about everything except the superiority of live mind to dead mind; for which basic verity God bless his holy name.

—Private letter, quoted by permission

Hugh Kenner

THE WAR WITH TIME

We must have the Past and the Future, Life simple, that is, to discharge ourselves in, and keep us pure for non-life, that is Art.

—Wyndham Lewis, *Blast* No. 1.

1: THE MAN FROM NOWHERE

The Wyndham Lewis of subsequent legend materialized one day in 1909 on the stairway at 84 Holland Park Avenue, London. Mr. Ford Madox Ford—then Hueffer—was at the top of the stairs, pink and aghast that his privacy and his luncheon with the original of Christopher Tietjens should be invaded by a silent steeple-hatted figure wearing a huge black cape. The figure mounted the stairs, saying nothing. From beneath the cape it produced and flourished crumpled rolls of manuscript, which it pressed into Ford's unnerved hands. More wads of paper appeared from beneath the hat, from inside the waistcoat, from the pockets of the long-tailed coat. Ford numbly accepted them. All the time the figure said nothing. At last it went slowly down the stairs, without a word, and vanished.

Ford, if he was the last pre-Raphaelite, was also a great editor; he printed in subsequent numbers of *The English Review* the prose sketches decipherable on those Sibylline sheets. The first¹ was an account of certain "Poles" who gulled the bourgeois landladies of Breton watering-places by pretending to be artists. (Rumors of the dealer Vollard's prices for stray Gauguins had recently made "artist" a magic word in the provinces.) Having exiled himself from the Slavic world because he had run out of money, the "Pole" (who was usually really a Russian) selected a victim and, disguised as a noble in suede gloves, paid three months' board in advance. After that he paid no more, and battenning on the inscrutable Breton hospitality, became a gentle and mysterious parasite.

¹"The Pole," *English Review*, May 1909.

This mystery man without a past had before him in 1909 a lively future. He is the Wyndham Lewis protagonist, who arrives out of nowhere onto the pages of the book: successively Kreisler in *Tarr*, Ker-Orr in *The Wild Body*, Zagreus in *The Apes of God*, Kell-Imrie in *Snooty Baronet*, Hardcaster in *The Revenge for Love*, and Vincent Penhale in *The Vulgar Streak*. Having for a page and a half described a man's face and extracted the man from a taxi ("Then stealthily there issued from its doors, erect and with a certain brag in his carriage, a black-suited six-footer, a dollar-bill between his teeth, drawing off large driving-gauntlets") the narrator-hero of *Snooty Baronet* asserts,

The face was mine. I must apologize for arriving as it were incognito upon the scene.

The black-suited six-footer with a certain brag in his carriage is a 1932 incarnation of the "Pole" of 1909 and the most virtuosic master of the Lewisian vocabulary of dramatic gestures; he only apologizes because he is the first of Lewis's clubmen-personae of the thirties. Horace Zagreus broke in upon his fellow-apes with a less studied éclat:

"I suppose no one else is coming?"

"Not so far as I know—no, no one but Mr. Rogers, unless her ladyship has anyone coming."

"She didn't mention that she had."

The door opened as though to swallow the room. A small man in black was first revealed holding it by the handle.

"Mr. Zackroost sir, to see you."

A tall figure eclipsed at once the body-servant of the invalid baronet, and . . .

Zagreus is an especially schematized paradigm. Within a few pages of his sudden appearance, he performs the other ritual action of the Lewis hero: he disowns his past. The past, as he is shepherding his protégé Daniel Boleyn through London traffic, manifests itself on the opposite sidewalk and, despite Zagreus' attempt at evasive tactics, succeeds in confronting him in the shape of a puffed little man with a thinning tan. After a page of frosty conversation—

"Well goodbye!" Horace exclaimed hastily.

"Is that all?" . . .

"Run away Francis like a good boy!" said Horace firmly as he turned away, while, strong in the emanations of the unhealthy days of long-ago, the old companion's claim to recognition for things dead and gone thrust on him its cruel caricature.

Rejoining Boleyn, Horace Zagreus swept away at a gallop . . . "That is an awful man!" at last he remarked.

Like the "Pole," Lewis's protagonist dabbles in some mode of creation, or exists on the fringe of an art-world; Zagreus is a specialist in "genius," Kreisler an art-student, Percy a manipulator of Chelsea Pinkos, Penhale reputed to be a fashionable designer. Like the "Pole's" his means of support are either exiguous or invisible: the crisis of *The Vulgar Streak* turns on the discovery that Penhale exists by passing counterfeit money. Like the "Pole," he is a figure of melodrama who imposes a vibrating reality by permitting us to see around him a little. We are made aware that we are meant to accept his opinions, however bizarre, as diagrams of a richer and saner *bizarrierie* offstage. Sometimes he seems aware that he is being read about, and busies himself, like Kreisler or Penhale, disowning a past the better to assimilate his energies to sustaining what he would have us take him for in the present. Sometimes, having mobilized his forces before the curtain goes up, he arrives by fiat from Mars like the apparition on Ford's stairs, inhibiting questions with aggressive implacability. "I have never," Ford recalled, "known anyone else whose silence was a positive rather than a negative quantity": and the Lewis protagonist can impose himself on the reader with the aplomb of that phantom.

It is a profound intuition of how best to make himself seem real that inspires this impostor to maintain his knowing relationship with the art-world. It is his way of maintaining contact with his creator, who holds art to be the mirror of Self, and Self in reverence as the one thing real, wrung from the void by will. As Zagreus "broadcasts" the opinions of the omniscient Pierpoint, the protagonist more or less clumsily imitates Wyndham Lewis, painter and mystery-man, who placed the personae of his early paintings in a moon-landscape, argued in 1914 that England was a suitable place for creative artists to work *because* it was a cultural desert,

and has spoken, in a chapter called "The Case Against Roots," of feeling at home in America's "wholly excellent vacuum" because "no one really belongs there more than I do."² The strategy of excluding the past from view as to enhance the sensationalism of the present has often, during his forty-five year's career, commended itself to the painter who, regarding art as a civilized substitute for magic, is forwardly conscious of the way the painter's activity takes no account of Time.

The magician's gestures owe their meaning to the fact that the rabbit from the hat—like the story from the cape—has no history. More flamboyantly than his irritation with roots, Lewis's manifestation on the stairway was part of a war with Time—especially with the time past his heroes emphatically disown—a war which underlies every manifestation of his genius, from the galvanic absolutism of his prose syntax (which, at its most characteristic, works by systematic denial of the existence of sequence) to his heroic studio-portraits of the 1930's, in which certain men existing in time—Eliot, Spender—are transformed into looming objects on which "a sort of immortality descends . . . it is an immortality which, in the case of painting, they have to pay for with death, or at least with its coldness and immobility."³

It is a Lexis axiom that we cannot see what is before our eyes. "The Present can only be revealed to people when it has become *Yesterday*;"⁴ in fact "There is no Present—there is Past and Future, and there is Art."⁵ Hence "The production of a work of art is, I believe, strictly the work of a visionary . . . If you say that creative art is a spell, a talisman, an incantation—that it is *magic*, in short, there, too, I believe you would be correctly describing it."⁶ So the Artist is a man at war with Time, inhabiting the invisible point between Past and Future, and the Lewis protagonist is his melodramatic Ape.

²*America and Cosmic Man*, 184.

³*Wyndham Lewis the Artist*, 337. See also Mr. Mudrick's article in this issue.

⁴*Paleface*, 269.

⁵*Blast* No. 1, 147.

⁶*Time and Western Man*, 198.

2: PLOT AND PERSONA

The person at war with Time occupies a metaphysical position replete with bitter energy, "up here on the world's brink;" we find its elements in the other two early stories proffered on Ford's stairs from under the cape of the apparition: "Les Saltimbanques" and "Bestre."

The Saltimbanques Lewis observed in Brittany. They are prototypes for the bleakest of the artist-allotropes that inhabit his mind. If you haul the Lewisian artist down into visibility, you find that, being human, he doesn't quite believe in his lonely role (hence his interest in simulacra who manage to corrupt its austerity with a gratifying ration of vulgar power) and that in his creative activities, behind which the mind cannot quite mobilize itself, there is consequently an element of compulsiveness. "In a painting certain forms MUST be SO; in the same meticulous, profane manner that your pen or book must lie on the table at a certain angle, your clothes at night be arranged in a set personal symmetry, certain birds be avoided, a set of railings tapped with your hand as you pass, without missing one."⁷ The Breton acrobats' performance is a bitter ritual of placation. Their lot is "to dress themselves up every day and knock each other about and tie their bodies up in knots before an astounded congregation of country people."⁸

It was as though they were lost in a land peopled by mastodons and rhinoceri. Whenever they met one of these monsters—which was on an average twice a day—their only means of escape was by charming it with their pipes, which never failed to render it harmless and satisfied. They would hurry on, until they met another...

On occasion, however, the crowd will not be held quite at bay. The gloomy and meaningless performance, punctuated by displays of dignity ("A mournful, solemn and respectful, a *dead* silence would have been the ideal way, from his point of view, for the audience to have greeted his pathetic skill") is suddenly truncated by a boy in the audience who begins jeering.

⁷Blast No. 1, 198.

⁸"Les Saltimbanques," *English Review*, August 1909.

This boy had probably never thought comically before. Like corrosive lavas that illuminate before they destroy the object in their path, the torrent of his thoughts wrapt this dim and brutal figure. Revealed by his own genial eruption he beheld it, with all the character of a vision. His oracular vehemence suggested a sudden awakening, as though the comedy of existence had burst in upon his active young brain without warning, and, in the form and nature of this awkward showman was now raging within him like a heady wine. He had of a sudden opened his lips and begun covering this man with mockery. I was extremely moved and even awed at this sight.

The boy who began to think comically and the showman who would have preferred to be appreciated in respectful dead silence reappear five years later as Hanp and Arghoi in *The Enemy of the Stars*, and fourteen years after that, repeatedly subdivided, as a whole cast of characters in *The Childermass*. They are as we shall see the two principles of action—Self and Not-self—whose quarrel in Lewis's mind guarantees the energy of his books and pictures.

As "The Pole" gave us the ex-nihil Lewis protagonist, so the irruption of the boy in "Les Saltimbanques" into a schematized performance gives us the elements of the Lewis plot. The generic theme of his novels is a battle of personalities which finally erupts from under and *truncates* a conventional action: Kreisler and Penhale hang themselves, Victor Stamp drops over a precipice, Hanp stabs Arghoi and then dies by drowning. Each has up to the moment of that consummation been engaged in the plot of a conventional novel of action (the circus) and simultaneously in a series of tensions whose logic, suddenly intersecting that of convention, precipitates him into "the universe of absence." For the logic of conventional plots unfolds in time, and we get a significant action when, through the agency of personality, Time is denied.

Something of the sort was in Lewis's mind in 1909 when he opened "Some Innkeepers and Bestre"⁹ with a protest against the conventional plots that make use of inns to set a flagging action going again "in a whirl of adventures of the high-road": a protest, that is, against *Tom Jones*, the most mechanically plotted of Eng-

⁹*English Review*, June 1909.

lish novels from initial intrigue to final marriage. The Lewis plot and the Lewis hero (this time Bestre the innkeeper) were both in his mind, if in corners of it not yet connected, when he wrote this sketch, but a difficulty which was to exercise his calamitously fecund ingenuity for many years is spotlighted by the fact that he began it with a reflective protest and not with Bestre himself. Bestre doesn't appear in fact, for eight pages. The author's trouble seems to be that he can't make this primitive impostor interesting enough to sustain a significance which he feels transcends that of the "Pole" or the circus proprietor. In seeking to aggrandize trivial fact to the statute of a felt significance, he is competing with Bestre himself, whose gambit is to gaze at a new acquaintance "as though the latter, all unconscious, were entering a world full of astonishing things, of which he had not yet become aware. . . . At the passing of an enemy Bestre will pull up his blind with the defiant enthusiasm with which men raise aloft the standard of their country; one is meant to see, or rather hear, in his springy walk a chant of victory, in his immobility intimidation."

"He seems teaching you in his look the amazement you should feel;" one can imagine Ford's reminiscent amusement when he read in the manuscript that sentence and the rhetorical question that follows it:

Has Bestre discovered the only type of action compatible with artistic creation, assuring security and calm to him that holds the key of the situation, in a certain degree compelling others to accept your rules?

Bestre, in fact, isn't quite the Lewis hero; he is the Lewis persona, particularly the persona of the late nineteen-twenties. He was finally¹⁰ gingered up to size in 1922, by means of a prose which Lewis spent the next thirteen years developing. What he developed it from was, surprisingly, a blend of Dickens and Chesterton which reflects the vogue of 1909 in a way he couldn't help but subsequently disown, if only to gain leverage for wreaking his symbolic havoc on such plots as the opening paragraph gently

¹⁰"Bestre," in *The Wild Body*, 114-136. First published in *The Tyro*, No. 2 (1922).

deplores. The gambit with which the second paragraph opens, in fact, is borrowed from the Chesterton of *The Defendant*—

... But I have entered my inns with none of these preoccupations; with the result that I have discovered that even the most visionary of customers—the Knight of La Mancha himself—could not be more so than many a provincial French innkeeper that I have met with...

—and there is an especially diverting Dickensian page about a Paris furniture-mover, which disappeared altogether in the 1922 redaction of the story. Lewis began to write, with a considerable display of ease and talent, in a familiar English comic tradition, and if his Dickens is salted with Smollet the taste remains familiar. It is not surprising that, having given away in this manner his possession of a relaxed comic gift, the man at war with the Past should have ducked into five years silence, to emerge in 1914, the principles of his new way with words securely in hand, between the caliope-covers of *Blast*.

3: VORTICIST PROSE

In 1914 he seems resolved never again to write a phrase that will betray a hint of literary antecedents; but that is only the most superficial of the ways in which his "Vorticist" prose abolished Time. It is in *Blast* that the Wyndham Lewis who appeared in silence on Ford's stairway finds an appropriate tongue. It is explosive in principle as well as in strategy; each sentence joins words by fiat, and the compound, though one cannot tell by what process it was arrived at, asserts as undeniably as a troop of Martians its right to corporate existence. It is, vastly elaborated, the style of its showpiece the 1928 *Childermass*, and its mechanisms underlie the wonderfully expressive prose of Lewis's masterpiece, the 1937 *Revenge for Love*. We can observe it, not quite coming off, in the *Blast* account of a thunderclap:

The great beer-coloured sky, at the fuss, leapt in a fête of green gaiety.

Its immense lines bent like whalebones and sprang back with slight deaf thunder.

The sky, two clouds, their furious shadows, fought.

The bleak misty hospital of the horizon grew pale with fluid of anger.

The trees were wiped out in a blow.

Thunderstorms happen in time and manifest duration; it is the necessity for placing things in succession, admitting sequence between paragraphs where the instinct at work within sentences is to abolish it, that makes this passage sound laboured. Where nothing is happening, however, the effect is memorable. Here are the stars:

The stars shone madly in the archaic blank wilderness of the universe, machines of prey.

Mastodons, placid in electric atmosphere, white rivers of power. They stood in eternal black sunlight. . . .

Throats iron eternities, drinking heavy radiance, limbs towers of blatant light, the stars poised, immensely distant with their metal sides, pantheistic machines.

It is a style composed of phrases, not actions. The verb, inexorably the *time*-word is where possible reduced to impotence ("shone" and "stood") or else simply omitted. Of course there is no reason why there should not be more such phrases about the stars, or for that matter why a few of them should not be omitted, except that they seem, once achieved, too good to scrap. Sporadically conscious though he was of the necessity, Lewis didn't succeed in making his prose *move* rather than accumulate, until, in the 1930's, he had struck his truce with Time.

He had only to abandon the posterish convention of *Blast*, however, to possess a method for presenting any baroque stasis, whether of persons or of places, with infallible vigour. This account of Ford was written in 1949:

Hueffer was a flabby lemon and pink giant, who hung his mouth open as though he were an animal at the Zoo inviting buns—especially when ladies were present. Over the gaping mouth damply depended the ragged ends of a pale lemon moustache. This ex-collaborator with Joseph Conrad was himself, it always occurred to me, a typical figure out of a Conrad book—a caterer, or corn-factor, coming on board—blowing like a porpoise with the exertion—at some Eastern port . . .¹¹

¹¹*Rude Assignment*, 122.

This is only a slightly more hurried application of the devices by which the stars and trees in *Blast*, or the characters of *Tarr*, were rendered 35 years earlier.

If anything extended could be done with it, this early style would be one of the most impressive inventions in the history of English literature. It remains one of the most fascinating. Its trick is worth isolating in a sentence of which the elements are conventional and only their mode of combination novel:

Henry James: Ghost psychology of New England old maid: stately maze of imperturbable analogies.

Every word attaches itself to Henry James; but it was Lewis who attached them alchemically to one another. It isn't the maze that is stately, nor the analogies that are imperturbable; but by unhooking each of these words from its appointed object and joining them instead to each other Lewis, in setting his signature on the combination, releases magnetisms that make its elements seem, once so joined, inseparable. The phrases thus arrived at are so condensed that their rightness grows wonderfully persuasive. Assonance and rhythm—not meaning—cause this particular ordering of the terms to snap together like a clockspring; any other arrangement, once we have seen this one, would hang open in flaccid incompetence. In this universe of words—precisely the “finely sculptured surface of sheer words” Lewis much later¹² suggested discriminating readers should hunger for—we soon stop worrying about mere reality. It is a sort of dream-literature of unexampled energy.

4: THE ENEMY OF THE STARS

Besides the “Vorticist” prose, and the poster-like *Blasts* and *Blesses* that display its staccato mannerisms in inch-high letters on a 9x12 page, *Blast* contains *The Enemy of the Stars* and a sequence of art-manifestoes. The impulse that produced the prose produced them: it would be truer to say that the prose led to them than that they requisitioned it. Certainly they explicate its assumptions with innocent clarity. Its verbal cataracts pour, we find, over worn configurations of feelings, naively limited by contrast

¹²*Men Without Art*, 115.

5

BLAST HUMOUR

Quack **ENGLISH** drug for stupidity and sleepiness.

Arch enemy of **REAL**, conventionalizing like

gunshot, freezing supple

REAL in ferocious chemistry
of laughter.

BLAST SPORT

HUMOUR'S FIRST COUSIN AND ACCOMPLICE.

Impossibility for Englishman to be
grave and keep his end up,
psychologically.

Impossible for him to use Humour
as well and be persistently
grave.

Alas! necessity for big doll's show
in front of mouth.

Visitation of Heaven on
English Miss

gums, canines of **FIXED GRIN**
Death's Head symbol of Anti-Life.

CURSE those who will hang over this
Manifesto with **SILLY CANINES** exposed.

with the "Russian" complexities of *Tarr* (also written in 1914) or the grim comic version of the *Little Review* pieces of 1917—"The Code of a Herdsman," "Cantelman's Spring-Mate," and "Inferior Religions"—which, as they keep the style subservient to a complex sensibility, are the best work of Lewis's early period. These works have no successors, however, until 1937, because instead of consolidating their gains Lewis chose to spend twenty years working out the implications of Vorticism. The first step in this trek toward the desert is *The Enemy of the Stars*.

The scene of this dream-play ("very well acted by you and me") is nowhere, nowhen: "Some bleak circus, uncovered, carefully chosen, vivid night. It is packed with Posterity, silent and expectant." This is the ring of the Breton Saltimbanques, transformed into a scene into which the audience looks down "as though it were a hut rolled half on its back, doorupwards, characters giddily mounting in its opening." Here before the eyes of Posterity, the Lewis hero ("me") does battle with "you." The hero, on his first extended appearance, is named Arghol. "Each force attempts to shake him . . . He lies like human strata of infernal biologies. Walks like wary shifting of bodies in distant equipose. Sits like a god built by an architectural stream, fecunded by mad blasts of sunlight."

They strain to see him, a gladiator who has come to fight a ghost, Humanity—the great Sport of Future Mankind.

He is the prime athlete exponent of this sport in its palmy days. Posterity slowly sinks into the hypnotic trance of Art, and the Arena is transformed into the necessary scene.

The red walls of the Universe now shut them in, with this condemned protagonist.

They breathe in close atmosphere of terror and necessity till the execution is over, the red walls recede, the universe satisfied.

In a performance like that of the Breton circus proprietor, Arghol undergoes with dignity an anonymous beating to which he disdains not to submit himself, then "imprisoned in a messed socket of existence" defies the Stars, "cliff of cadaverous beaming force," his candle against their cosmos. At this moment the heckling boy of "Les Saltimbanques" makes his appearance under the name of Hanp.

Hanp is Lewis's Ubu-Roi. If Arghol is the lonely hero ("Blows rain on me. Mine is not a popular post. It is my destiny, right enough, an extremely unpleasant one") Hanp, who emerges "coughing like a goat, rolling a cigarette," is sensual man, "strong and insolent with consciousness stuffed in him in anonymous form of vastness of Humanity: full of rage at gigantic insolence and superiority, combined with utter uncleanness and despicableness—all back to physical parallel—of his Master." His grudge against Arghol is that Arghol doesn't merge into his crowd-life:

Between Personality and Mankind it is always a question of dog and cat; they are diametrically opposed species. Self is the ancient race, the rest are the new ones. Self is the race that lost. But Mankind still suspects Egoistic plots, and hunts Pretenders.

Arghol's grudge against Hanp is that, being in a sense Arghol's creation, he is Arghol's Ape:

I find I wanted to make a naif yapping Poodle-parasite of you.—I shall always be a prostitute.

I wanted to make my self; you understand?

Every man who wants to make another HIMSELF, is seeking a companion for his detached ailment of a self.

You are an unclean little beast, crept gloomily out of my ego. You are the world, brother, with its family objections to me.

"You have crept gloomily out of my ego": that is the key to much of Lewis's subsequent career. As Arghol elsewhere says,

Men have a loathsome deformity called Self; affliction got through indiscriminate rubbing against their fellows: Social excrescence.

Their being is regulated by exigencies of this affliction. Only one operation can cure it: the suicide's knife.

Hence the War with Time: "The process and condition of life, without any exception, is a grotesque degradation and 'souillure' of the original solitude of the soul. There is no help for it, since each gesture and word partakes of it, and the child has already covered himself with mire." It is intrinsic to the dialectical purity of the world of Hanp and Arghol that nothing can happen but the initial and ultimate acts of violence: the beating of Arghol,

then talk, then the double death. The Vorticist metaphysic of character implies as we shall see a metaphysic of violence; ordinary actions are but as pulse-beats and breathings; only the most cataclysmic events can be said to *happen*.

In *The Lion and the Fox*, a work of non-fiction in which the Arghol-figure has read Machiavelli, manufactures colossi, and is named Shakespeare, Lewis puts it in this way: the tragedy of Shakespeare's tremendous heroes ("the world's adversary and opposite") is "that they are involved in a *real* action: whereas they come from, and naturally inhabit, an ideal world." It is the process of "souillure," inseparable from human contact, that destroys them at last. A boy always breaks in upon the lonely ritual of the Saltimbanques, "for in the pessimism of tragedy not only have the great always to be vanquished; but they have always to be overcome by trivial opponents who substitute a poor and vulgar thing for the great and whole thing that they have destroyed."¹³ The hero is caught in two worlds, that of ideal austerity and that of Time's sequential mechanisms; and it is a denizen of the time-world strikes him down. It is no wonder that Lewis was for a long time interested in the author of *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*, and the Sonnets against Time.

Now the artist is a hero who, caught in the time-world, projects visions of a world tolerable *for him*. His visions don't assist him in the time world, of course: "A scornful optimism, with its confident onslaughts on our snobbism, will not make material existence a peer for our energy. The gladiator is not a perpetual monument of triumphant health: Napoleon was harried with Elbas: moments of vision are blurred rapidly, and the poet sinks into the rhetoric of the will." But Art has nothing to do with the welter of "Life":

... perfection is not in the waves or houses that the poet sees. To rationalise that appearance is not possible. Beauty is an icy douche of ease and happiness at something *suggesting* perfect conditions for an organism: it remains suggestion. A stormy landscape, and a pigment consisting of a lake of hard, yet florid waves; delight in each brilliant scoop or ragged burst,

¹³*The Lion and the Fox*, 188.

was John Constable's beauty. Leonardo's consisted in a red rain on the shadowed side of heads, and heads of massive female aesthetes. Uccello accumulated pale parallels, and delighted in cold architecture of distinct colour. Korin found in the symmetrical gushing of water, in waves like huge vegetable insects, traced and worked faintly, on a golden pate, his business. Cézanne like cumbrous, democratic slabs of life, slightly leaning, transfixed in vegetable intensity.

Beauty is an immense predilection, a perfect conviction of the desirability of a certain thing, whatever that thing may be. It is a universe for one organism. . . .¹⁴

That is a formulation of 1917, as slightly retouched 10 years later. It indicates the one sort of reality which, in Lewis's view, the artist can meaningfully pursue: a coherent organization of selected and compatible sensations, often emblematic in their grouping. Apart from the muscular and intimidating dream-landscapes of *The Enemy of the Stars* and *The Childermass*, it appears in his writing only in flashes; but the wedges, voids and perpendiculars of his own "immense predilection" are the vocabulary of most of his painting. The fiction, on the other hand, tends to deal with the mechanisms which interfere with the realization of Lewisian visions in any medium but paint; so up till the mid-30's it is with the art-manifestoes, rather than with the art, that the fiction is in touch. It is Satire rather than Fiction.

5: ANTI-HANP

The art-manifestoes in *Blast* are written in the person of Arghol. Though a glinting humor ("We will convert the King if possible. A VORTICIST KING! WHY NOT?") tempers their fanaticism and inhibits Arghol's latent conviction that "anything but yourself is dirt. Anybody that is," still Hanp the crowd-man, insolently aware that he is stuffed with the anonymous vastness of Humanity, remains in plain sight as the ubiquitous foe.

We want to make in England not a popular art, not a revival of lost folk art, or a romantic fostering of such unactual conditions, but to make individuals, wherever found.

¹⁴"Inferior Religions," in *The Wild Body*, 188.

Hanp puts in his appearance as the trenchant wiseacre who says, "After all, LIFE is the important thing!"

This is the typical cowardly attitude of those who have failed with their minds, and are discouraged and unstrung before the problems of their Spirit; who fall back on their stomachs and the meaner workings of their senses.

Nature will give you, then, grass enough for cow or a sheep, any fleshy conquest you can compass. One thing she is unable to give, that that is peculiar to men. Such stranger stuff men must get out of themselves.

Allied as he is with Nature, Hanp, of course, does a bit of painting himself:

In the same way, Nature is a blessed retreat, in art, for those artists whose imagination is mean and feeble, whose vocation and instinct are unrobust. When they find themselves in front of infinite Nature with their little paint-box, they squint their eyes at her professionally, and coo with lazy contentment . . . She does their thinking and seeing for them. Of course, when they commence painting, technical difficulties come along, they sweat a bit, and anxiety settles down on them. But they regard themselves as martyrs and heroes. They are lazy workmen, grappling with the difficulties of their trade!

Hanp as painter isn't merely Mr. Churchill squatted on his camp stool, or Mr. Eisenhower boyishly administering pigments that will not quite equate the well-scrubbed candour of Bobby Jones. He is the avantgarde of 1914, which Lewis's view was siding with the Plain Man's distate for the intellect. The School of Paris was fooling with the superficialities of "life," and expending its intelligence on the incidental technical difficulties. Lewis has since recalled

... how much "modernist" art—in this term we can include the French Impressionist school—has battered upon what is silly and ugly, upon the commonplaces and vulgarities of modern everyday existence . . . And Picasso, who started as an impressionist, and his fellow artists, made a fetish almost of a box of matches, a bottle of beer, an ugly vase or kitchen chair."¹⁵

Hence the axiom of 1917: MATTER THAT HAS NOT SUFFICIENT MIND TO PERMEATE IT GROWS, AS YOU KNOW, GANGRENOUS AND ROTTEN.¹⁶

¹⁵*Rude Assignment*, 156.

¹⁶"The Code of a Herdsman."

Hence the great polemic, *Time and Western Man*, of 1928; for it was with the benediction of official "thought" that the Hanps of the art-world, being themselves mere executants instead of thinkers and so simply accepting ideas from higher up, were placing a premium upon the moment, upon the trivial, upon sensations that pass away. But the Vorticist, who spurns the allure of Nature to seek within himself the sterner and stranger stuff peculiar to men, makes Art a war against Time:

There is no Present—there is Past and Future, and there is Art.

Any moment not weakly relaxed and slipping back, or, on the other hand, dreaming optimistically, is Art.

"Just Life," or soi-disant "Reality" is a fourth quantity, made up of the Past, the Future, and Art.

This impure Present our Vortex despises and ignores.¹⁷

This "impure Present" is the subject of Lewis's polemics on Bloomsbury, where the Past, the Future and "Art" were combined in a pseudo-enlightenment that in his assault on the *Transition* mob he called "a sort of cheap and unnecessary, popularized *artist-ic-ness* of outlook, the creative faculty, released into popular life, and possessed by everybody"¹⁸—paradise of amateurs, Sitwells, and Apes of God.

The Vorticist Arghols, on the other hand, are "proud, handsome, and predatory."

Our Vortex is fed up with your dispersals, reasonable chicken-men.

Our Vortex is proud of its polished sides.

Our Vortex will not hear of anything but its disastrous polished dance.

Our Vortex desires the immobile rhythm of its swiftness.

Our Vortex rushed out like an angry dog at your Impressionist fuss.

Our Vortex is white and abstract with its red-hot swiftness.

As for "Life,"

The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest.

¹⁷Blast No. 1, 147-8.

¹⁸*The Diabolical Principle*, 66.

The Vorticist is not the Slave of Commotion, but its Master.
The Vorticist does not suck up to Life.
He let Life know its Place in a Vorticist Universe!

In those brave days ("A Vorticist King! Why not?") Lewis expressed what has always governed his mind, more directly than ever since. "The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest" because motion occurs in Time but the whirlpool's still center is fixed and timeless. "The moment a man feels or realizes himself as an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time." Thus, it is Art that orders Life, not Life that feeds Art. And the energy required to produce works that herocially disdane either pre-descessors or posterity, that belong to no trend and contain no seeds, that borrow the idiom of no past eyes yet don't pretend to be portraits of tomorrow's chromeplated commonplaces, resembles the tension of sustaining a position midway between the poles of a powerful magnet. Nothing is done by process, everything by fiat.

The question whether the world of *The Enemy of the Stars* or Vorticist paintings like *Plan of War* or *Slow Attack* is real, poses a problem in the metaphysics of "reality." In "life" we know things by their histories, and this eternal present (not to be confused with its ape the Bergsonian "continuous present") has none. Thus *death* can be regarded by the Vorticist neither as a transition, nor as a termination, for that is to define it in terms of process. Death must be some kind of absolute, perhaps the only absolute, and Lewis's handling of it exhibits in action his procedure for transforming negations into realities. Hanp feels friendly toward the dead Arghol because Arghol dead is reduced to Hanp's preferred element: "There was only flesh there, and all our flesh is the same. Something distant, terrible and eccentric, bathing in that milky snore, had been struck and banished from matter." There is no pathos in the corpse, because pathos focusses two emotions that function only in time: regret, and apprehension. The universe has altered, however: "The night was suddenly absurdly peaceful, trying richly to please him with gracious movements of trees, and gay processions of arctic clouds. Relief of grateful universe." The emphasis is not on the termination of Arghol's career, nor on what-

ever new state he may be conceived to have entered; it is on the feel of the world with one element subtracted.

In *Snooty Baronet*, Kell-Imrie examines his feelings about the dead McPhail: can one go on treating this "dweller in the universe of Absence" as though he were permanently settled in a distant country? . . .

Frankly I think not . . . I actually find, upon examining it, that I *do not like Rob so well* as when he was not dead. Is it possible to dislike the dead, because they are dead? I think so. Therefore I will say "I *liked* Rob McPhail." I do not like him quite so much now, because he is dead.—There is nothing more to like! After all, I could not *marry* a dead person! So how could I *like* one, really? But once I *liked* him very much. That certainly is beyond question. To me that is valueless. But it is *true*.¹⁹

6: THE AUTOMATON PHASE

McPhail, in a way, was a creation of Kell-Imrie's, now passed beyond his power; that is one reason for the baronet's irritation. Arghol, we remember, thought of Hanp as his creation. It is an axiom of Lewis the artist that *only the self is real, and it creates everything else*. "Self" is a principle of identity added to the ordinary mechanisms of human personality, and it is rare and hated. It is the principle that baptizes artists and heroes, collecting their energies into the invisible Present between Past and Future and out of Time. The crowd-men, on the contrary, possess a pseudo-reality only in the past, where memory gathers innumerable successive moments into a simulacrum of permanence, or the Future of their irresponsible dreams. "All men, in the matter of [their] past, are little immortals. It is not an 'immortality' to be very puffed up about, it is true."²⁰ But it is the artist's compulsion to make the things around him as real in the Present as he is; and this he can only do by creating them. "We must constantly strive to *enrich* abstraction till it is almost plain life, or rather to get deeply enough immersed in material life to experience the shaping power amongst its vibrations, and to accentuate and perpetuate

¹⁹*Snooty Baronet*, 231.

²⁰*Blasting and Bombardiering*, 7.

these."²¹ The Self collects the hints afforded by the "fine angry senseless music" of the Plain of Death's empty whirling²² and projects them as forms filled with its own vitality. The Self does this in pigment or in words; but it also does it in life.

The essay that prefaced the account of "Bestre" in the *English Review* describes the sort of abstractness Lewis has continued to desiderate in dealings with other people; for, as he later remarks, "people seem to me to be rather walking notions than 'real' entities," and it is a mistake to imagine that one is getting closer to them, or tapping any meaningful reality, in participating in their sensuous *Gemütlichkeit*. One must maintain one's aloofness from the hot Timeworld of the senses.

So man has developed a kind of abstract factor in his mind and self, a social nature that is the equivalent of money, a kind of conventional, nondescript and mongrel energy, that can at any moment be launched toward a friend . . . This artificial and characterless go-between . . . keeps the man's individual nature all the more inviolable and unmodified.

This energy ripens his friends, and he bestows it upon them "because the richer these friends be, spiritually or materially, according to the desire of the person, the more he feels his own love and power." When we come at length to Bestre himself we find that the abstractness of his relations with other people is hostile, not benevolent. No matter: it still serves the function of making him feel his own self-love and power.

Lewis's 1922 rewriting of this story is one of the most curious documents in his canon; more contradictions come to the surface there than anywhere else. We have seen that the subject—Bestre's technique for aggrandizing his person and activities—had a compulsive fascination for the Ur-Lewis, and that the prose he at length invented to reproduce this process generated dreams and manifestoes enough to keep it occupied for some years. When the instrument was at last applied to its original subject, the result wasn't a triumph but an arresting artistic disaster. The Vorticist prose has a certain spontaneous innocence when it is dreaming

²¹*Blast* No. 2, 40.

²²*The Childermass*, 291.

or declaiming; but when it engages at length with an allegedly "real" world ("Bestre" No. 2 was Lewis's first fiction since the "Cantelman's Spring-Mate" of 1917, the writing of which obeys a different principle entirely) Arghol's "souillure" corrupts every gesture. Lewis the Vorticist was better off when he acted as if the world didn't exist; the showiness possible within that circumscription remained compatible with honesty.

The emphasis in the new version of "Bestre" is on the way this Breton inkeeper feuds with people by looking at them; his weapon is the Eye.

He has the anatomical instinct of the hymenopter for his prey's most morbid spot; for an old wound; for lurking vanity. He goes into the other's eye, seeks it and strikes. On a physical blemish he turns a scornful and careless rain like a garden hose. If the deep vanity is on the wearer's back, or in his walk or gaze, he sluices it with an abundance you would not expect his small eyes capable of delivering.²³

While Bestre is busy waging with hectic gusto his petty wars (one of his victims emits "the rash grating philippic of a battered cat, limping to safety"), the Lewis prose is performing its most spectacular harlequinades—

With a flexible imbrication reminiscent of a shutter-lipped ape, a bud of tongue still showing, he shot the latch of his upper lip down in front of the nether one. . . .
 . . . his tufted vertex charging about the plank ceiling,—generally ricochetting like a dripping sturgeon in a boat's bottom—arms warm brown, ju-jitsu of his guts, tan canvas shoes and trousers rippling in ribbed planes as he darted about—with a filthy snicker for the scuttling female, and a stark cock of the eye for an unknown figure miles to his right: he filled this short tunnel with clever parabolas and vertices, neat little stutterings of triumph, goggle-eyed hypnotisms, in retrospect, for his hearers. . . .

This rush of imagery makes it hard to notice that we are not in the presence of something very important indeed. It also tends to conceal the narrator Ker-Orr's self-revelation:

I learnt a great deal from Bestre. He is one of my masters. When the moment came for me to discover myself—a thing I

²³*The Wild Body*, 128.

believe few people have done so thoroughly, so early in life and so quickly—I recognize more and more the beauty of Bestre.

This affirms what in the first version was only a question about the suitability of Bestre as an artist's paradigm. When we put beside it two more paragraphs about the fanatical Breton we suddenly possess the key to the bewildering enegy of the prose:

When discovered in the thick of one of his dumb battles, he has the air of a fine company promoter, concerned, trying to corrupt some sombre fact into shielding for an hour his unwieldy fiction until some fresh wrangle can retrieve it. . . .

He is looking at reality with a professional eye, so to speak: with a professional liar's. I have observed that the more cramped and meagre his action has been, the more exuberant his account of the affair is afterwards.

The moment, having glimpsed this tipped hand, we begin to suspect that Ker-Orr's narrative frenzy covers "cramped and meagre" adventures inadequate to the importance the prose bestows on them, his final comment on Brestre takes on new meaning:

Then he has the common impulse to avenge that self that has been perishing under the knout of a bad reality, by glorifying and surfeiting it on its return to the imagination.

There is a very thin line, in short, between creating the beauty which is "an icy douche of ease and happiness at something suggesting perfect conditions for an organism"—the symmetrical gushing of water, or red rain on the shadowed sides of heads—and *using* things, rather than *knowing* them, to surfeit the abused self. It is the thin line between God and his Apes, and Lewis takes so little pains to dissociate himself from Ker-Orr throughout *The Wild Body*, that we may fairly deduce that he himself found it easy to confuse the Vorticist's still point of maximum energy with a hectic random fusillade of images to aggrandize the trivial or non-existent. When you are creating your own world your will must proceed without criteria. The *Blast* manifestoes are gay, and *The Enemy of the Stars* has a solemn enough Nietzschean logic, but the work of fifteen years later—*The Wild Body*, *The Childermass*, *The Apes of God*—is loosely brilliant and replete with

snags unforeseen in the days of the easy Hanp-Arghol schema. And in the late twenties and thirties we find Lewis operating under a perpetual compulsion to retrieve his past work from oblivion for the purpose of projecting his current complexities into it. The stories of 1909 and 1917 were heavily re-worked in 1927; *The Enemy of the Stars* was issued in a luxurious, elaborate, but less intelligible form in 1932; the *Blast* manifestoes were deceptively revised for inclusion in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist* in 1939; and what is offered in *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) as "first-hand impressions of the opening stages of a great war," "written on the spot" and now quoted, for historic value, from *Blast*, has actually been almost unrecognizably rewritten from beginning to end.

In none of these reprints except that of *Tarr* in 1928 is there any adequate indication of the amount of reworking that has been done. And in no case, not even that of *Tarr*, is the revision, except in detail, an improvement. The war with Time was involving Lewis in a good many Pyrrhic compromises, masked by greater and greater brilliance of language. It is a fair guess that the past of the *Blast* days seemed to him in retrospect "cramped and meagre," and in need, on Bestre's principle, of more exuberant rendering. What at Lewis's own prompting is usually taken for his best period—from *The Wild Body* to *Snooty Baronet*—is in fact his worst. It is symptomatic that *The Apes of God*, his most ambitious novel, is his worst-written.

Ker-Orr wrote in 1927 that he had learned much from Bestre; in the same year Lewis launched a new magazine with a new persona: no longer Arghol but The Enemy. For the next thirteen years he continued to play The Enemy, and simultaneously to search for a socially acceptable role compatible with that one: journalist, clubman, good fellow, ex-soldier, The Enemy's polemic manifestations—Part I of *Time and Western Man*, *Paleface*, *The Diabolical Principle*, *The Doom of Youth*—are brilliant assaults on a Hanp-world in which Lewis discerns much more organization than inhered in his earlier diagnosis of the Crowd-soul.²⁴ Indeed, these polemics develop side by side with a new

²⁴The principle of the polemics of this period is explained in *Paleface*:

theory of art which greatly extends and largely supersedes that of the *Blast* manifestoes. It is a theory of satiric art (Lewis had come to employ literary art for satiric purposes exclusively, reserving the grimmer heroisms of *The Enemy of the Stars* for his paintings) and its principle is simple: *Hanp always desires to mechanise himself*. Being unreal, he seeks the articulation of the machine. The new dichotomy, announced in 1927, is that between The Wild Body and the Machine. On the one hand, "Laughter is the Wild Body's song of triumph;" on the other, "The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observation of a *thing* behaving like a person."²⁵

These principles go back to the first appearance of the "Inferior Religions" essay in *The Little Review* in 1917, and in fact are based on the distinction, adumbrated in *Blast* three years before that, between the Self which alone is real, and the Not-self's Things that swim in Time. It was only in the 1927 *Wild Body* volume that he fully explained the principle and began to apply it to fiction and polemic.

The wheel at Carisbrooke imposes a set of movements upon the donkey inside it, in drawing water from the well, that is easy to grasp. But in the case of a hotel or fishing-boat, for instance, the complexity of the rhythmic scheme is so great that it passes as open and untrammelled life. This subtle and wider mechanism merges, for the spectators, in, the general variety of nature. Yet we have in most lives the spectacle of a pattern as circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid.²⁶

Such characters are "not creations but puppets... They transcend life and are complete cyphers... A comic type is a failure of a considerable energy, an imitation and standardizing of self, suggesting the existence of a uniform humanity..."

the author's object is to provide his readers with a key "so that, with its aid, they may be able to read any work of art presented to them, and resisting the skillful blandishments of the fictionist, reject this plausible 'life' that often is not life, and understand the ideologic or philosophic basis of these confusing entertainments, where so many false ideas change hands or change heads." (*Paleface*, 109.) The whole introduction to Part II of this book (97-112) repays study.

²⁵*The Wild Body*, 237, 247.

²⁶*The Wild Body*, 233-4.

These quotations unite the Lewis plot and the Lewis puppets; the machine of plot and the machine of character. The significant action which winds up a Lewis novel is a break through the plot machinery into the Universe of Absence performed by someone who in so doing breaks out of the Time-bound world of behaviourist puppetry into a moral world. Or rather—"moral" is misleading—into a world in which people can exist by acting violently enough. As Arghol saw long ago, the only significant action in such a world is annihilation—preferably of the Self. The Self is the spring of significant action; it is also a loathsome deformity. "Only one operation can cure it—the suicide's knife." The advance of 1927 on 1914 is that the puppet-world is now conceived as comic; mechanism is the principle of comedy.

The corollary of this is that the whole of Lewis's art has now broken with time. Hanp's "Life" and "Nature" are no longer an ambient welter: they are gathered up into mechanism, on the principle that whatever inhabits Time moves in the grip of Causality. A machine is static; its motions are all implied in its structure, and you can figure them out by inspecting it in repose. The hotel-worlds of *The Wild Body*, with their elaborate compulsive rhythms, are static worlds, "little monuments of logic." They are comic because essentially trivial. So are their inhabitants, which Lewis soon saw could be described as machines too. The overture to *The Apes of God* is his first extended exercise in the game of presenting people as comic mechanisms—

She lowered her body into its appointed cavity, in the theatrical illumination, ounce by ounce—back first, grappled to Bridget, bull-dog grit all-out—at last riveted as though by suction within its elastic crater, corseted by its mattresses of silk from waist to bottom, one large feeble arm riding the billows of its substantial fluted brim. . . . A strong wheezing sigh, as the new air went in and the foul air went out, and then she realized the tones of a muted fog-horn to exclaim—

"There will come a time Bridget when I shall not be able to move about like that!"²⁷

Snooty Baronet is much slicker:

When I look at Humph's chin I am reminded of a strong-box. The chap is all chin. I hate this face more than I hate my

²⁷*The Apes of God*, 23-4.

own, which is saying a good deal. I disliked it from the start, a long time ago.

As a box, supposing the thing were that, it would as a matter of course be fitted with a false bottom. It is not a straight-forward chin. If you opened it up (touching a spring, and removing the lower jaw, with its snow-white, well-stocked dentistry and well-upholstered coral gums) you would detect that the spacious cavity did not represent *all* of the chin. The box would not be as deep as you had expected, that is not *quite* so deep. There would be a half-inch of draughtage missing, to be accounted for somehow. The hollow would be shortweight. . . .²⁸

Snooty—a peppy and pointless novel—is the apotheosis and catharsis of Behaviourism as a comic technique. Midway through the book the behaviourist-narrator—a version of Lewis the polemical exposé of social and political mechanism—accidentally apes the gestures of a mechanical doll in a Hatter's window. One or two bystanders glance in astonishment from the one to the other, and the fact suddenly penetrates *Snooty's* consciousness, that, even as the dummy is almost alive, so he himself is almost a dummy. *Snooty* shares with the author of *Time and Western Man*²⁹ a Berkeleian conviction that, since we know only the outsides of people, they cease to enjoy significant existence when we leave them:

Was I certain, for instance, that Humph still existed, now that I no longer had him beneath my eyes? No I was not. That would be indeed an absurd assumption. It was far *more* absurd to suppose him still moving about, and behaving as I expected him to behave, now that I was no longer there, than to suppose him blotted out or dropped out of existence.

In the presence of the automaton it suddenly occurs to him that there are two sides to this coin:

I knew that *I* was not always existing either: in fact that I was a fitful appearance. . . . And must I confess it? I was very slightly alarmed. I saw that I had to *compete* with these other creatures bursting up all over the imaginary landscape, and struggling against me to be *real*—like a passionate battle for necessary air, in a confined place.³⁰

²⁸*Snooty Baronet*, 57.

²⁹See *Time and Western Man*, 473-480. On p. 480 he calls Berkeley's, with certain reservations, "one of the best of all possible philosophic worlds."

³⁰*Snooty Baronet*, 161, 163.

Since Snooty doesn't quite grasp that his conviction that he creates Humph by observing him is less the consequence of a theory than of his measureless contempt for Humph, he is able to chatter jauntily to the end of the novel. But evidently Lewis grasped, about the mid-thirties, that the Wild Body had lurched into a blind alley. The failure of *Snooty*—his most finely machined novel—is in a way the theme of *Snooty*; it is as though the narrator, having discovered outside the hatter's window the irrelevance of his mechanical contempt, lived out the second phase of his adventures and wrote them up to prove that even as a comic technique behaviourism could lead nowhere. (Since by hypothesis nothing whatever leads anywhere, he isn't abashed.) It is only the murkiness of *The Wild Body's* synthetic energy that concealed the fact from writer as from reader in 1927. The much brisker rattletrap of *Snooty's* technique carries the experiment launched five years before into the desert in which this last novel of the automaton phase ends.

7: THE TRUCE

Tarr (1918) was Lewis's first novel, and it contained human beings. Kreisler and Anastasya seem to have gotten in by mistake, while the author's eye was fixed on his persona Tarr, but they got in. The people in *The Revenge for Love* (1937) and *The Vulgar Streak* (1941) are human beings once more, and through no miscalculation. These are the three novels, and the only three, in which Lewis does more than develop the potentialities of Vorticist prose for depicting static persons and places, or substituting analysis for interaction. There isn't a *person* in *The Wild Body*, or the *Apes*, or *Snooty*, nor does the polemic of 1926 to 1935 take any account of persons, except for the author, who freely (and accurately) describes himself as a "genius."³¹ Indeed the polemic denies their existence. That people prefer to be "puppets" rather than "natures" and so welcome any conspiracy to keep them that way is the reiterated premise of *The Art of Being Ruled*, of *Time and Western Man*, of *The Doom of Youth*. It is a premise sufficiently meaningful for political journalism or satire, but its

³¹For instance, *The Doom of Youth*, 132.

consequence is that Arghol *creates*, in the process of talking to and about them, the swarm of Hanps by which he is exacerbated. *The Enemy of the Stars*, in its naively Nietzschean way, was uncannily prescient, though Lewis was twenty years living out its implication that if everything but the Self is trivial, then the Self's own activities become meaningless. In a "Vortex" headed "Be Thyself" in the second number of *Blast* (1915) Lewis had written:

... Why try and give the impression of a consistent and indivisible personality?

You can establish yourself either as a Machine of two similar fraternal surfaces overlapping,

Or, more sentimentally, you may postulate the relation of object and its shadow for your two selves.

There is Yourself, and there is the External World, that fat mass you browse on.

You knead it into an amorphous imitation of yourself inside yourself.

Sometimes you speak through its huskier mouth, sometimes through yours.

Do not confuse yourself with it, or weaken the esoteric lines of fine original being. . . .

Hurry up and get into this harmonious and sane duality.

The thought of the old Body-and-Soul, Male-and-Female, Eternal Duet of Existence, can perhaps be of help to you, if you hesitate still to invent yourself properly.

This, one can see in retrospect, is a formula for getting vitality into Art when there is by hypothesis none in the world, by dividing one's creative personality and staging shadow-fights. "The Individual, the isolated, the single object, is, you will admit, an absurdity" if it is the only thing in the universe. When the Self brings another being into the world, the new being soon inspires a disgust which like Arghol's disgust for Hanp finally engulfs the Self's own amour-propre. And when the energy fails that has so fiercely shaken this formula, and you lose interest in animating abstract painting with it, you find that your condition does not differ from that of the sterile split-man Julius Ratner, Ape of God, contemplating himself in the glass:

He gazed at this sphinx which he called self,⁹ or rather that others called that, not Ratner—at all events it stood there whatever it was. Impossible to question it. Anything but that

could be interrogated, but one's self, from that no one could get an answer, even for Julius it was a sort of ape-like hideous alien. . . . Such as it was it was that in which Ratner believed—a rat caught in his own rattrap, for he was cowed and dull, he was yet attached to the fortunes of the rat-self—where it went Ratner would go, Ratner would defend it to the end—only over the dead body of Ratner would another approach it to destroy it. And so on.³²

The only difference between this self-awareness of a lowly Ape and Arghol's view of Hanp is that Arghol thrives on the black emotional voltages of his superiority to Hanp. Such a superiority to Humph—the Hanp of the later book—is what Snooty loses before the hatter's dummy. And that gone, two courses only are open: either you undergo destruction as did Arghol, or you allow other persons to exist.

In the mid-thirties Lewis's polemic shifted its aim from political analysis to political action, on behalf of people in whose name a war was being brewed over nothing. Simultaneously, out of a sort of act of belief in the existence of other people, he wrote *The Revenge for Love*.

Since this masterpiece is in print, the reader can simply be referred to it. Suffice it to say that the recurrent formula of the *Blast* and the automaton phases: Master hectoring disciple, but a phony master because he apes the Lewis offstage—Arghol and Hanp, Zagreus and Boleyn, Snooty and Humph, Kerr-Orr and his puppets—this formula is transformed into something freer and less schematic. Percy Hardcaster the professional revolutionist is the Arghol of *The Revenge for Love*, insulated from the people around him by the illusion of his own professionalism: but at least two of the people from whom he is insulated are realer than he. And of the two acts of cataclysmic violence in the book, one—the one that occurs in the middle, the beating of Percy by the sex-automaton Jack—restages the kicking of Arghol at the outset of *The Enemy of the Stars* in a way that suggests the irrelevant neutrality such actions now seem to Lewis to possess. Percy isn't kicked because he is Arghol, the Self, the thing sensual mankind have

³²*The Apes of God*, 154.

conspired to destroy, though it is true that he has just finished posing as something of the kind. He is kicked because he happens to be in the way of Jack's libido. Nor is Percy allowed to destroy himself, Kreisler-like, at the close. He drops a glycerine tear on the floor of a Spanish prison at the news that he has been an instrument in the destruction of other and realer people. He isn't, when the curtain goes down, Arghol the Outcast of the Absolute: simply a middle-class Englishman posing to himself as The Injured Party.

The *Vulgar Streak* resumes the classic Lewis pattern: *phony* master (the man out of nowhere), *phony* disciple, the "Saltimbanques" plot, and the final cataclysm. But it is resumed with a difference: the elaborate suppression of the protagonist's past isn't the author's rhetoric of mystification but part of a plot whose machinery, well-lubricated and tuned for a final run, makes straight for the necessary precipice and wrecks itself without fuss. There is no gratuitous drama: Vincent Penhale, last of the Arghols, is a fraud and hangs himself because there is nothing left to do.

There, hanging from the disused gas-suspension in the middle of the hall, was Mr. Penhale, his tongue protruding, and his face black. A piece of white paper, in the manner of a placard, was attached to his chest.

There is no pretense that the world heaves a sigh of relief, and no lather about the Universe of Absence. The placard reads simply, "Whoever finds this body, may do what they like with it. *I* don't want it. *Signed.* Its former inhabitant."³³ So Lewis bids farewell to the Wild Body he piloted from Brittany to Attlee's London.

It would have been presumptuous even to say that he would write no more: in the past few years he has in fact published three books. One story, "Time the Tiger" in *Rotting Hill* (1950), gives us a last glimpse of the War with Time. "Time the Tiger" has Lewis's predilected rhythm: a long slow narrative suddenly truncated by violence. The unreal logical world into which the violence breaks is this time the never-land of socialist Britain, the grotesque phenomena of which he renders, in painstaking shabby detail, as though a portion of *The Childermass* were being re-

³³*The Vulgar Streak*, 240.

written in the accent of *The Old Wives' Tale*. The man from nowhere is this time a petty socialist, his companion a hearty petty Tory feeding his good-humored wrath on the past. The two pass a typical day among inefficient telephone operators, shabby doctors, vendors of defective shirts, and deceptively sumptuous oculists and dispensing opticians. The dice aren't loaded; the relics of Charles's Tory world are as drained of vitality as the denizens of Mark's socialist one. Mark—an Arghol grown old—deludes himself mechanically, but his Utopia remains a hollow box in which rattle a few shabby phenomena. It had never even the aesthetic purity to qualify as a Vorticist dream now transposed ("souillure") from mind into life. Time, they agree, has leapt upon them; the fifty years since 1900, when the bee was in the clover and all was well with the world, have contained a millenium of events, and the two men, whose friendship, a legacy of the twenties, is now unreal, are prompted by a French film to desultory speculation on devouring Time. Mark is convinced that he has been reborn into the new era, his adoption of socialism a mystical baptism; whereas Charles, he thinks, is now a ghost from a past life, whom he contemplates almost as Snooty did Humph.

The crisis occurs at lunch with Charles's sister, whom Mark has long yearned after but hasn't seen for fourteen years. He has been perplexed by dreams in which she grows old and dies; but the well-fleshed woman at the restaurant table seems to have discovered the trick of denying Time.

Ida looked—oh, around twenty-five. The lazy laughing lips of Rossetti's Jenny ("fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea") were as roseate and indolent as ever: her eyes were steady, an almost imperceptible dance, as well, giving them a remote glitter of gaiety.

As if it were a *top*, humming and spinning on without changing position, perhaps she would go on being like this until suddenly time asserted itself and she would stop dead. . . .

Ida claims no miracles:

She shook her 'twenties curls with a nervous and defensive mirth. "A little vanishing-cream, combined with an empty mind, is quite enough," she laughed. So he and the woman he

had always been in love with—and had not married any other because she was always there in his imagination—eyed one another benignly. He exposed his haunted vacuum, and she automatically entered and warmed it to the temperature of paradise.³⁴

Their talk takes them back to the euphoria of the 'twenties; "They were a party heated by the suns of the past." Undoing Time, "the three old friends rolled again in memory in the Swiss snows at Wengren—or drifted talking very youngly along 'The High' on they way to Blackwell's to buy Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*." Suddenly the tiger leaps: Ida, drunk, begins to declaim politics. Mark half-rises: "I am not going to listen to this nonsense;" and his soul is suddenly utterly emptied of the quantum of romance it has all these years been harbouring. "He had consented to play Romeo, and Juliet, at the critical moment, had acquired the mask of Col. Blimp, haranguing him from the moonlit balcony." That evening, in loneliness, he writes to another woman. "These were the final pangs of Mark's rebirth into a novel age, as well as the death-throes of Ida's image. But he did not identify his pangs: he did not analyse. He went to his desk, took out a piece of notepaper and wrote 'My dear Wendy.' Wendy Richardson was a good party-woman, with a pretty face..."

A few months later he and Charles exchange stilted notes; and that is the end.

This story about politics is a triumph of poise. There is no scowling showman on the stairs, who has learned from Bestre about the aggrandizement of the null. The people are real, and their world; and behaving with resilience that always commands respect, they invite a pity that is never excessive. For the focus isn't on the rightness or wrongness of any human arrangements, nor on the grimacing absurdity of any puppet. It is on the fact that three people's lives have been ruined.

³⁴*Rotting Hill*, 176.

WYNDHAM LEWIS: A LIST OF WRITINGS

WL born in 1884.

- 1909: Three sketches in Ford's *English Review* ("The 'Pole'," May; "Some Innkeepers and Bestre," June; "Les Saltimbanques," August).
- 1914: *Blast* No. I, edited by Lewis: included manifestoes and "The Enemy of the Stars."
- 1914: *Blast* No. 2: more manifestoes, and "The Crowd-master."
- 1917: Published in *The Little Review*: "Imaginary Letters," May-June-July, including "The Code of a Herdsman;" "Inferior Religions," September; "Cantelman's Spring-Mate," October; Part I of "A Soldier of Humour," December.
- 1918: *The Little Review*: Part II of "A Soldier of Humour," January; "Imaginary Letters," March-April; "The Ideal Giant" (a play), May.
Tarr, a novel (written 1914, serialized in *The Egoist*, 1916-17).
- 1919: *The Caliph's Design*, a pamphlet on the relationship of art to human surroundings.
- 1926: *The Art of Being Ruled*. Lewis's seminal polemic.
- 1927: *The Enemy*, Nos. 1 & 2.
The Lion and the Fox, a book about Shakespeare.
Time and Western Man. His major polemic work.
The Wild Body, short stories. (The three 1909 *English Review* sketches, drastically rewritten; "A Soldier of Humour," *The Little Review*, somewhat expanded; and other stories, some presumably based on writing done 10 or 15 years earlier; plus "Inferior Religions" from the 1917 *Little Review*, an essay about his fictional assumptions; and two negligible stories of the twenties.)

- 1928: *The Childermass*, part 1. His most finished dream-prose. There are still occasional rumblings about the possible completion of this work.
Tarr, an elaborate revision of the 1918 text.
- 1929: *The Enemy*, No. 3.
Paleface, an application of the principles of *Time and Western Man* to the work of, inter alia, Lawrence.
- 1930: *The Apes of God*: a novel about Bloomsbury.
Satire and Fiction, a pamphlet about the attempted suppression of the *Apes*, with an essay on Lewis's satiric methods later incorporated into *Men Without Art*.
- 1931: *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator*: an attack on the *Transition* coterie, complemented by an essay on the democratization of art.
Hitler, an account of the wallow of post-war Germany, written at a time when it was possible to regard Hitler (not yet in power) as a man of peace.
- 1932: *The Doom of Youth*: polemic on youth-politics.
The Enemy of the Stars, a drastic revision of the *Blast* play, with an essay on "The Physics of the Not-Self."
Filibusters in Barbary, a travel-book.
Snooty Baronet, a novel.
- 1933: *The Old Gang and the New*, a pamphlet summarizing *The Doom of Youth*, which was suppressed in England.
One Way Song, satiric verse.
- 1934: *Men Without Art*, a gloomy prophecy, containing essays on Faulkner, Hemingway, Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis.
- 1935: *The Roaring Queen*, a novel, suppressed before publication.
- 1936: *Left Wings Over Europe*, a pamphlet against the impending war.
- 1937: *Blasting and Bombardiering*, a genial autobiography of the years 1914-1926, including excellent anecdotal material on Joyce, Eliot, and Pound.

Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!, another peace-offensive, in semi-satiric form.

The Revenge for Love, his best novel.

1938: *The Mysterious Mr. Bull*: a pot-boiler on the English character.

1939: *The Jews, Are They Human?*

The Hitler Cult. In these two books Lewis sought to dispel the impression that his peace-pamphlets and 1931 Hitler book advocated doctrinaire Nazism.

Wyndham Lewis the Artist: The Blast manifestoes, *The Caliph's Design*, and material from *The Tyro*, extensively rewritten with new material.

1940: *America, I Presume*. Fictionalized impressions.

1941: *The Vulgar Streak*: his final novel to date.

1942: *Anglosaxony, a League that Works*.

1948: *America and Cosmic Man*, a look at the U. S., more abstract than that of 1940.

1950: *Rude Assignment*, a defensive autobiography and survey of his polemic career.

1952: *Rotting Hill*, stories and sketches of post-war England, including "The Rot" and "Time the Tiger."

The Writer and the Absolute: Sartre, Camus, Malraux, Orwell.

The indispensable works for an understanding of Lewis are: the *Blast* and *Little Review* materials in their original form, *Tarr*, *Time and Western Man*, *The Apes of God*, *Men Without Art*, *The Revenge for Love*, *The Vulgar Streak*, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, and *Rude Assignment*.

His literary output can usefully be divided into (1) creative work; (2) rewriting of past creative work; (3) what a friend calls

"kite-flying to pay the rent;" (4) a body of ambiguous polemic midway between this last division and the first two.

It should never be forgotten that Lewis is one of the three or four most important of modern painters, that his work as a painter has developed continuously since at least 1912, and that his two careers bear an intimate relationship to one another. *The Art of Wyndham Lewis*, by Charles Handley-Read (Faber, 1951) is an excellent survey of Lewis's painting, with numerous reproductions.

Marvin Mudrick

THE DOUBLE-ARTIST AND THE INJURED PARTY

To be an artist of major achievement in two of the arts is the unique contemporary distinction of Wyndham Lewis. Nor does his versatility stop here. As a painter, he has been abstractist, semi-abstractist, self-labeled "super"-naturalist (mobilized against the frivolities of "sur"-realism), and truthful portraitist of celebrities, on every scale from exquisite pencil life-studies to architectural oils, with no interruption or damage, in transit, to his authoritative skill and vigor or to the measuring ironic draughtman's eye they serve. As a writer, he has been social critic, political polemicist, aesthetic theoretician, truculent maker of movements and manifestoes; he is also, in the time he spares impatiently from painting and pamphleteering, creator of several offhand, unplotted, talky, merely brilliant novels as well as of *Tarr*, *The Revenge for Love*, and *The Vulgar Streak*, all of them together passed with exasperating impartiality—every chapter, the trivial and the superb—through the same unmistakable fixing medium, the most expressively original style in English fiction.

It is a style, as one expects from a painter, almost blindly visual, whether it describes a Van Gogh being faked:

The sunset piece was a great rain of opaque particles of light—each particle dipped in a bath of reddish, or brazen, solution. Gnarled figures of peasants, with the striations of tree trunks, gathered in the foreground like hobos in a hailstorm. But this hailstorm was the sunset. And the hailstones were the opaque particles showering down from the conflagration of the romantic solar disc, about to set, like a bloated firework.

There was a big clumsy cartwheel system, ordering the distribution of the particles. The nave of the cartwheel was the body of the crimson sun. The usual woolwork effect proper to Van Gogh obsessed everything that was terra firma—the rocks, the olives, the farms, the churches. There was a small town half submerged in the welter of incendiary particles.¹

¹Wyndham Lewis, *The Revenge for Love*, Methuen, London, 1952, 251.

or an antique aristocrat rising from her chair:

The old body-servant was in a distant spot, she came up with a noiseless even tread and stood resting with patience upon an alpenstock. Her ladyship perceived the alpenstock: she directed peremptory injunctions throughout her ruined establishment, to the entire vasomotor system beneath—bells rang hot-temperedly in every basement and galley.

A local briskness, of a muscular nature, was patent, in the depths of the chair. The massively-anchored person shook as if from the hidden hammering of a propeller, revolving at her stern, out of sight. A determined claw went out and grappled the alpenstock. It planted it at a forward cant to obtain the preliminary purchase.

Without fuss the two masses came apart. They were cut open in two pieces. As her body came away from the dense bolsters of its cyclopean cradle, out into space, the skimpy alpaca forearm of the priestly Bridget, a delicate splint, pressed in against the small of the four-square back. It was applied above the region where the mid-victorian wasp-waist lay buried in adipose.

The unsteady solid rose a few inches, like the levitation of a narwhal. Seconded by alpenstock and body-servant (holding her humble breath), the escaping half began to move out from the deep vent. It abstracted itself slowly. Something imperfectly animate had cast off from a portion of its self. It was departing, with a grim paralytic toddle, elsewhere. The socket of the enormous chair yawned just short of her hindparts.²

It is an eye seeing; the description of the art-forgery may in fact read, carelessly, like nothing more than superior art criticism. But the reduction, the regularizing and mechanizing—this eye's way of seeing—are Lewis's own characteristic criticism of life as well as of art: the sudden "hobos in a hailstorm" which, in the act of uncannily evoking a familiar Van Gogh texture, flattens a back-to-the-farm cliché; the image of self-admiring provincialism in the "romantic solar disk . . . a bloated firework" illuminating barlike peasants against the undifferentiated smear of everything else.

With Lady Fredigone, dowager of the Bloomsbury Apes, the process is on the other hand clear at once, in clinical detail: the rhythms of old age do not merely call attention to themselves,

²Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God*, London, 1930, 22.

they also parody in slow motion the equally inflexible bloodless rhythms of the matriarchal life, from Victoria to Lytton Strachey. What Lewis sees and submits to our inspection, in Van Gogh and Bloomsbury both, is something almost human and not-quite-life, as tame, precise, and coöperative as a tractor: the comedy of the machine.

Mechanism has been from the beginning Lewis's sustained preoccupation, though not at first in its passive comic aspect. The young instigator and theoretician of 1914 chose to see it spring angular and glittering out of chaos, an unprophesied genesis out of the vortex; so Vorticism: "We hunt machines, they are our favorite game. We invent them and hunt them down. . . . Our Vortex is proud of its polished sides. Our Vortex will not hear anything but its disastrous polished dance."³ And the young painter was already supplying the theoretician with examples: *The Centauress*,⁴ as early as 1912, its dark burnished figure in relief against a gaudy primal whirl of arcs and rectangles; the fully abstract *Planners*, a motion of intersecting strips and lines supervised at their focus by a leaning, almost brooding head-like pattern in thick bars; above all, the apocalyptic *Design for the Publication Timon of Athens*, a mass of armed, helmeted, muscled automata streaming arrogantly outward and downward through the hard light of their shattered geometric landscape away from another primal vortex, which at the same time draws them (and the eye) back and in.

For almost a quarter-century after Lewis's 1914 manifesto, the principal theme of his paintings remained this aggressive and somber predominance of the machine. The abstracting impulse of Vorticism was gradually modified by Lewis's tendency toward familiar natural and man-made shapes; the vortex itself lost its force and yielded to the stability of the recognizable; but even

³Wyndham Lewis, *Blast* No. 1, London, 20 June 1914, 148f.

⁴All the paintings mentioned in this essay are reproduced in C. Handley-Read, *The Art of Wyndham Lewis*, Faber and Faber, London, 1951. Besides other pertinent information, Mr. Handley-Read notes the present locations of all the paintings and lists books and periodicals containing color reproductions of those paintings he has been obliged to reproduce in black-and-white.

familiar shapes found their way in only as they were especially susceptible to rigorous and mechanistic formalizing: man himself, shields, masks, armor, totems, the measurable volumes of architecture. So, in order of time and decreasing abstraction, we have for example, *The Pillar*, an unmistakable column supported by a number of sinister whorled and knifelike objects on a blank background; *Sentinels*, its winged, ball-chested figures, with heads like a child's spinning top, having escaped the dying vortex at one edge of the canvas and accommodated themselves to a stable, black-and-white, rectilinear environment; *Athanaton*, a disquieting arrangement of column, totem, mask, and robot-like figures facing a blank corridor, for which the title—"Immortality"—provides a sardonic commentary; and, perhaps the most imposing example of what Lewis has called his "mixed idiom of pure-abstraction and stylized nature,"⁵ the teeming, almost photographic *Surrender of Barcelona*, stone towers of a fortress-city as perspective to groups of fully armored, faceless soldiers on foot and on horseback in colorful daylight, and, at dead center, the inconspicuous broken-necked figure of a man hanged from a huge dark stump.

Compare the implacable ironies of these as well as of the Vorticist canvases to the introduction, in *Tarr*, of Anastasya:

When she laughed, this commotion was transmitted to her body as though sharp, sonorous blows had been struck on her mouth. . . . She exuded personality with alarming and disgusting intensity. It was an ostentation similar to diamonds and gold watch-chains. Kreisler felt himself in the midst of a cascade, a hot cascade.⁶

and the image of Kreisler's devotion to her:

"Do you intend studying here, Fräulein?" he asked, with a new deference in his tone—hardly a canine whine, but deep servient bass of the faithful St. Bernard. She seemed to have noticed this something new already, and Kreisler on all fours evidently astonished her. She was inclined to stroke him, of course, but at the same time to ask what was the matter.⁷

and it becomes clear that Lewis the novelist was attempting some-

⁵Quoted in *The Art of Wyndham Lewis*, 54.

⁶Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr*, New York, 1926, 92.

⁷*Ibid*, 96f.

thing wholly different from Lewis the painter. The difference is a fact, if not an explanation, of Lewis's career from 1914 (the year of *Tarr* and the *Timon* drawing) to 1930. During this period he was a prolific and continuously (if limited) experimental painter, yet, having discovered for himself as early as *Tarr* the comedy of the animal, the mere animate, and the mechanical, he made no use of it at all in his paintings, which exploit much grimmer ironic metamorphoses; and he gave up the novel altogether in order to compose polemics on the doom of culture and reduction of man.

Lewis delayed until 1927, in the collection of short stories *The Wild Body*, his return to fiction and at the same time to comedy: a collection of stylized images not, as on his canvass, of terrifying authority, but "essays," as he called them, "in a new human mathematic . . . simple shapes, little monuments of logic;"⁸ and his first completed novel after *Tarr* did not come until 1930—*The Apes of God*, the most methodical example of Lewis's manipulation of language according to the terms he had in 1917 prescribed, and in *The Wild Body* reaffirmed with examples, for comedy: "The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a thing behaving like a person."⁹

This is Vorticism, adapted, reluctantly, to fiction and to the comic mode Lewis considers proper to it. Lewis has always been a very serious man, beset by his own severe hypotheses regarding the function of the artist and the nature of art; and he had, it appears, been unable to take fiction seriously enough to be convinced by his own formula for it. The 'twenties may not have seemed to him the time for anything so unactivistic as comedy; his literary energies were in any case being diverted into books of the most desperate controversy; and he may have recognized that Vorticism—even, as here, neatly redefined to admit and require the comic—provided not nearly so precise a formula for fiction as for painting.

However striking the portrait of an Anastasya or a Lady Fredigonde, the effect tends to terminate in the portrait itself: the

⁸Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body*, London, 1927, 234.

⁹*Ibid.*, 247.

novelistic interest of *Tarr* is, accidentally, in the lonely, pathetic internal career of Kreisler, which Lewis, contrary to all his own precepts, allows to engage him, while the Vorticist pyrotechnics of the book do little more than distract amusingly and in isolation. What on canvas gave to the brilliant draughtsman an obviously useful approach and a plan—the vortex, the motion round a moveless center, the robust stoical observer circling the impenetrable quasi-human object—turned out in the temporal art of fiction to inhibit him from moving not only inward but forward: even *Tarr*, minus Kreisler, remains in the mind as a series of more or less entertaining sketches scarcely related except by the author's shifting attention. The fact that Lewis went ahead in the early 'thirties to produce two novels—*The Apes of God* and *Snooty Baronet*—which recapitulate all the errors he had presumably renounced with his renunciation of the novel a decade and a half before, is tribute, perhaps to Lewis's faith in his resurrected formula, certainly to the provocativeness of his targets: the Bloomsbury dilettantes and the Lawrence (D. H. and T. E.)—fanciers, respectively. He was, however, still producing, rather than novels, aggregations of merciless verbal portraits in his most polished and external comedy-of-the-machine manner, a fiction without limbs or connective tissues, for the destruction of his enemies, by a professional painter who was writing, magnificently, like a painter.

Those changes in the tone and subject of an artist that result, at once, in masterpieces, or at least coincide with them, are probably inexplicable on the basis of any facts available to criticism. That Lewis, the author in 1932 of a novel as characteristically machine-minded in its imagery and slovenly in its structure and choice of material as *Snooty Baronet*, could create within five years *The Revenge for Love*, the most humane and the most comprehensive political novel of our time; that the painter, for twenty-five years, of doom-ridden robots in leafless extraplanetary landscapes could produce the great portraits of the late 'thirties—these are, certainly, mysterious phenomena. One may point, in his fiction, as far back as *Tarr* to the figure of Kreisler; or, much later, to the one memorable chapter in *Snooty Baronet*, the hair-raising "Hatter's Automaton," in which Lewis projects from within the

nightmare drift, cast off from the actual, of the comic imagination. One may refer, in his paintings, to the toughly accurate self-portrait of 1921, and then not till 1932 to the drawings of *Thirty Personalities*, one of which rather prematurely earned for Lewis, from a respected fellow-painter, the title of "greatest portraitist of this, or any other, time."¹⁰ And here is the biographical fact of his grave illness, which began in 1932 and required a convalescence of several years. In spite of hindsight, however, the suddenness of the consummations remains: *The Revenge for Love* came out, in Lewis's fifties, as his first non-Vorticist novel and his masterpiece; the portraits of Edith Sitwell, Spender, Pound, and the earlier one of Eliot, all completed between 1935 and 1939, were almost his first attempts at large-scale portraiture, the unquestionable crown of his painting.

In this apparent break with his own past, the most astonishing fact is that none of Lewis's skills, developed over a quarter-century by the irresponsibly brilliant novelist with grudges and the superb painter with self-chosen machine- (or stone-) age limitations of outlook—none of these immense skills, united so unprecedentedly in a single artist and handcuffed always to one self-protective hypothesis or another, was lost or diminished. In the celebrity-portraits, the Vorticist's incomparable rigor and clarity of outline not only survive, they are adapted and refined, with immediate mastery, to the needs of a representative likeness. In *The Revenge for Love* and in its successor *The Vulgar Streak* (less distinguished in range and intensity, but an authentic and moving novel), the temper of Lewis's comic prose, having subjected itself to social issues no longer merely as the substance of polemic but as the substance of fiction, achieves, at once, the sensitiveness to human presence, the dignity, direction, and point of great fiction. And Lewis's comic impulse, released belatedly into the new paintings and reaffirmed in the new novels, accepts at last in both media, with no sacrifice of firm contour, the coexistence of the last quality for which Lewis's discarded hypotheses would have left room: compassion.

The quality is so reticent and discriminating, adjusted so

¹⁰The painter was Sickert, quoted in *The Art of Wyndham Lewis*, 70.

discreetly to the capacity of Lewis's subjects, in the portraits of the four poets that it may be missed there altogether. Miss Sitwell, heavy-lidded, long-headed, wearing a soothsayer's cap, draped in her shapless Victorian but brightly colored skirt and mantle, poses the poet as Cassandra, self-consciously theatrical and anachronistic, saved by the strength of her pose and by its rejection of pathos. The portraits of Spender and Eliot, both done in 1938, pointedly complement each other. They are posed in much the same way, seated facing us, hands crossed and elbows on chair-arms, but Spender is closer, pushing toward us with blank protuberant eyes, the casual shirt and the coppery face and arms contradicted by an effeminate arched wrist and arched forefinger, a too-full pursed mouth, and, behind his well-fleshed head, sections of two splashy abstract paintings: the modern poet at home in Bohemia. Eliot, on the other hand, faces us almost diffidently, slumped a little, shy in his blue business suit, eyes not quite looking at us, hands inert on his lap, and, behind his head, a sickly-green panel flanked by two narrow panels painted with decorous stylized birds; on all of which the most interesting comment was made by Lewis eleven years later, in his second portrait of Eliot: a broad-shouldered, youthful-looking man leaning confidently toward us in a much better fitting suit, his legs crossed casually, nothing but vacant pale wall this time behind the masklike head, and on a table by him a pile of proofs ready to be, or perhaps already, disposed of: the poet, once imperfectly but now absolutely, transformed into the businessman-publisher. Finally, there is Pound, lying, almost flowing, back, eyes closed, in powerful elastic relaxation, faintly diabolic with his tufted slanting eyebrows, curt mouth, pointed nose and beard, and general ruddiness, but on the table by him a thick heap of newspapers and three ashtrays testifying to the affairs and tensions of *this* world: the poet as belligerent pragmatist. The four portraits plus the postscript of the 1949 Eliot portrait make up, in fact, an ironic iconography, complete and in heroic dimensions, of the contemporary world: The Poet in Our Time; and what startlingly distinguishes them, beyond grandeurs of conception and excellences of technique already exploited by the paintings in Lewis's past, is the pressure from within, the insistent presence, of human beings.

So, too, in the novels from the supper-table on which the snooty one-legged baronet makes Vorticist love—

She grappled with me at once, before the words were well out of my mouth, with the self-conscious gusto of a Chatterly-taught expert. But as I spoke I went to meet her—as I started my mechanical leg giving out an ominous creak (I had omitted to oil it, like watches and clocks these things require lubrication). I seized her stiffly round the body. All of her still passably lissom person—on the slight side—gave. It was the human willow, more or less. It fled into the hard argument of my muscular pressures. . . .

I was well away, I left much behind me I give you my word in those first spasms of peach-fed contact. Squatting upon the extremity of the supper-table, with my live leg (still laden with hearty muscles) I attacked the nether half of my aggressive adversary, and wound it cleverly round her reintegrating fork. (We were now both suspended upon my mechanical limb)¹¹—

Lewis directs our attention to the bed of the star-crossed lovers in *The Revenge for Love*, the mediocre but honest painter Victor Stamp and his adoring wife in a world that is much too clever for both, but that never succeeds in obliterating the dignity of their presence and their plight:

That morning Victor Stamp had risen late. Margaret woke him at seven, but Victor played possum. Like a signal-gun the bed went off bang as she sat up. But he absorbed the harsh report without stirring a muscle.

As Margaret ceased to move, the cymballing of the dilapidated box-mattress came to a stop. Stealthily she adjusted herself upon the ruins of their thirty-shilling love-nest (second-hand, in the Bell Street market), in an awkward squatting position—so as not to anger any further the stupid springs. So she remained for a while, unwilling on her side to make the next move. That should have come from Victor. The springs had spoken—it was for him to salute the day. But Victor played possum, in a sly sham-stupor, cut off from the crass daylight by a husky shoulder. He was having no truck with *this* day!

Two taut lines of extreme fatigue went down to the extremities of her mouth, which was well shaped and gentle, and of a youthful red. Her eyes were charged with the same painful uncertainty as was betrayed in her hesitation to get up.

¹¹Wyndham Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, London, 1932, 45f.

Having half got up, apart from the desire to spare Victor the crashing of the ambushed springs, when she should next move on them, she procrastinated. There was something in her dully-beating heart that sent out waves of apprehension from one end to the other of her halted body, awaiting the order to march. It was a counter-order. It told her to stop where she was; *not* to march, but to leave the day to look after itself. But it was always doing that, pretending to clairvoyance, and challenging the active spirit, alleging laws of its own. She had learnt to disregard its invitation—to refrain, or on the other hand to execute, under the compulsion of some mechanical superposition. But to-day she submitted to its interference, feeling too weak to resist.¹²

The techniques remain: mechanism speaks and acts and monopolizes the processes of the world, of everything from cheap bed-springs to fake Van Goghs, marionettes still jerk on not-very-invisible wires and jostle one another in an accepted pretense of life; these and their manipulators are, and make, the major business of life and of this exceptionally busy novel; but there are others, and at the very end the not wholly professionalized rebel Percy Hardcaster, having cleverly betrayed Victor and Margot *in absentia* but back in a political jail nevertheless, reluctantly listens, behind his professional mask, to the voice of Margot, now forever beyond revolutionary techniques and formulas, crying out for her murdered love:

But meanwhile a strained and hollow voice, part of a sham-culture outfit, but tender and halting, as if dismayed at the sound of its own bitter words, was talking in his ears, in a reproachful singsong. It was denouncing him out of the past, where alone now it was able to articulate; it was singling him out as a man who led people into mortal danger, people who were dear beyond expression to the possessor of the passionate, the artificial, the unreal, yet penetrating voice, and crying to him now to give back, she implored him, the young man, Absalom, whose life he had had in his keeping, and who had somehow, unaccountably, been lost, out of the world and out of Time! He saw a precipice. And the eyes in the mask of THE INJURED PARTY dilated in a spasm of astonished

¹²*The Revenge for Love*, 65.

self-pity. And down the front of the mask rolled a sudden tear, which fell upon the dirty floor of the prison.¹³

¹³*Ibid*, 377.

T. S. Eliot

WYNDHAM LEWIS: TWO VIEWS

TARR*

The fact that Mr. Wyndham Lewis is known as a draughtsman and painter is not of the least consequence to his standing as a prose writer. To treat his writing as an outlet for his superabundant vitality, or a means on his part of satisfying intellectual passions and keeping his art healthy, cannot lead to accurate criticism. His prose must be judged quite independently of his painting, he must be allowed the hypothesis of a dual creative personality. It would be quite another thing, of course, to find in his writing the evidences of a draughtsman's training—the training to respond to an ocular impression with the motion of a line on paper; the special reaction to vision and especially the development of the tactile sense, recognition of emotion by the physical strains and movements which are its basis.

It is already a commonplace to compare Mr. Lewis to Dostoevsky, analogy fostered by Mr. Lewis's explicit admiration for Dostoevsky. The relationship is so apparent that we can all the more easily be mistaken in our analysis of it. To find the resemblance is nothing; several other contemporary novelists have obviously admired Dostoevsky, the result is of no importance. Mr. Lewis has made such good use of Dostoevsky—has commandeered him so efficiently for his purposes—that his differences from the Russian must be insisted upon. His mind is different, his method is different, his aims are different.

The method of Mr. Lewis is in fact no more like that of Dostoevsky, taking *Tarr* as a whole, than it is like that of Flaubert. The book does not comply with any of the accepted categories of fiction. It is not the extended conte ("Cantelman's Spring Mate" is not on the pattern of either Turgenev or Maupassant). It is not the elaboration of a datum, as *Madame Bovary*. From the stand-

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point of a Dostoevsky novel *Tarr* needs filling out: so much of Dostoevsky's effect is due to apparent pure receptivity, lack of conscious selection, to the irrelevances which merely happen and contribute imperceptibly to a total impression. In contrast to Dostoevsky, Mr. Lewis is impressively deliberate, frigid; his interest in his own personages is wholly intellectual. This is a peculiar intellectuality, not kin to Flaubert; and perhaps inhuman would be a better word than frigid. Intelligence, however, is only a part of Mr. Lewis's quality; it is united with a vigorous physical organism which interests itself directly in sensation for its own sake. The direct contact with the senses, perception of the world of immediate experience with its own scale of values, is like Dostoevsky, but there is always the suggestion of a purely intellectual curiosity in the senses which will disconcert many readers of the Russian novelist. And there is another important quality, neither French nor Russian, which may disconcert them still more. This is Humour.

Humour is distinctly English. No one can be so aware of the environment of Stupidity as the Englishman; no other nationality perhaps provides so dense an environment as the English. The intelligent Englishman is more aware of loneliness, has more reserves, than the man of intelligence of any other nation. Wit is public, it is in the object; humor (I am speaking only of real humour) is the instinctive attempt of a sensitive mind to protect beauty against ugliness; and to protect itself against stupidity. The older British humor is of this sort; in that great but decadent humorist, Dickens, and in some of his contemporaries it is on the way to the imbecilities of *Punch*. Mr. Lewis's humour is near to Dickens, but on the right side, for it is not too remote from Ben Jonson. In *Tarr* it is by no means omnipresent. It turns up when the movement is relaxed, it disappears when the action moves rapidly. The action is in places very rapid indeed: from the blow given by Kreisler in the cafe to the suicide is one uninterrupted movement. The awakening of Kreisler by the alarum-clock is as good as anything of the sort by Dostoevsky; the feverish haste of the suit-case episode proceeds without a smile. Bertha's impression of Kreisler is good in the same way:

She saw side by side, and unconnected, the silent figure drawing her and the other one full of blindness and violence. Then there were two other figures, one getting up from the chair, yawning, and the present lazy one at the window—four in all, that she could not bring together somehow, each in a complete compartment of time of its own.

It is always with the appearance of Tarr, a very English figure, that Humour is apt to enter; whenever the situation is seen from Tarr's point of view. Humour invests him. He impressed you "as having inherited himself last week, and as under a great press of business to grasp the details and resources of the concern." Bertha's apartment, with the "repulsive shades of Islands of the Dead," is as it appeared to Tarr. Humour, indeed, protects Tarr from Bertha, from the less important Anastasya, from the Lipmann circle. As a figure in the book, indeed, he is protected too well: "Tarr exalts life into a Comedy," but it remains his (private) comedy. In one scene, and that in contact with Kreisler, Tarr is moved from his reserve into reality: the scene in which Tarr is forced out of Kreisler's bedroom. Here there is another point of contact with Dostoevsky, in a variation on one of Dostoevsky's best themes: Humiliation. This is one of the most important elements in human life, and one little exploited. Kreisler is a study in humiliation.

I do not understand the *Times* when it remarks that the book "is a very brilliant *reducto ad absurdum* not only of its own characters, but of its own method." I am not sure that there is one method at all; or that there is not a different method for Tarr, for Kreisler, and for Bertha. It is absurd to attack the method which produced Kreisler and Bertha; they are permanent for literature. But there is an invisible conflict in progress all the time, between Tarr and Kreisler, to impose two different methods upon the book. We cannot say, therefore, that the form is perfect. In form, and in the actual writing, it is surpassed by "Cantelman's Spring Mate." And "Inferior Religions" remains in my opinion the most indubitable evidence of genius, the most powerful piece of imaginative thought, of anything Mr. Lewis has written.

There can be no question of the importance of *Tarr*. But it is only in part a novel; for the rest, Mr. Lewis is a magician who

compels our interest in himself; he is the most fascinating personality of our time rather than a novelist. The artist, I believe, is more *primitive*, as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries, his experience is deeper than civilization, and he only uses the phenomena of civilization in expressing it. Primitive instincts and the acquired habit of ages are confounded in the ordinary man. In the work of Mr. Lewis we recognize the thought of the modern and the energy of the cave-man.

THE LION AND THE FOX*

The Lion and the Fox is a book which, like some other of Mr. Lewis's works, deals with several subjects; and the fact that it is concerned nominally (or sub-nominally) with Shakespeare should not lead us to suppose that his purposes here can be understood wholly without reference to other writings—chiefly, *The Art of Being Ruled*, and also *Time and Western Man*.

Even, however, as "another book about Shakespeare," the book says the best things that have been said about certain of his plays. Mr. Lewis points out that Shakespeare criticism, during the later 19th Century and up to the present time, has been mostly carried on by admirable competent academic scholars—who, whether they agree or not, have carried on the same traditions and have pursued the game according to much the same rules; and who have been representative of a particular class and a particular background of culture.¹ This foray by an outsider is therefore useful in breaking up certain ideas, whether we accept those of Mr. Lewis or not. This is an exposition of one side of Shakespeare; not, I think, the whole story. When anybody writes a book about Shakespeare, one can gather something of its limitations by observing what plays the author gives most attention to, and what plays he overlooks. Like Mr. Middleton Murry, Mr. Lewis gives scant attention to the later plays. But he deals with several very important

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¹Neither the work of Granville-Barker nor that of Wilson Knight falls quite within *this* category, but that is another story.

plays which had not hitherto received their dues: *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Coriolanus*. When one knows the work of Mr. Lewis, one understands his particular interest in these plays; but it is also interesting to observe that since *The Lion and the Fox* was written (1927) these three plays, and also *Measure for Measure*, have proved themselves to have a special attraction for the more intelligent part of the contemporary public. *The Lion and the Fox* may be called a commentary on *Timon*; though to leave it at that would be misleading. In any case, it contains the most revelatory criticism of *Timon*, *Troilus*, and *Coriolanus*, that I have read.

Coriolanus, in fact, has a peculiar pertinence. For Mr. Lewis has seen (what the French public, a few years ago seems to have missed) that *Coriolanus* is not a defence of aristocracy, or a mere attack on the mob. Shakespeare is, in fact, completely critical and detached from any partisanship: in this play his own emotion is very strong indeed, but cannot be associated with that of any character or group in the play—and it is this detachment which makes the ordinary reader find the most violent play rather frigid. It is never a popular point of view. *The Lion and the Fox* is also a book about politics; but instead of calling it a "political book" we should do better to call it an "anti-political" book. And for this reason it is very pertinently concerned with Machiavelli.

Now in "politics" there are found two kinds of mind—though the two may sometimes be found in apparent combination. There is the ruler—the man of action, whose purpose is to gain power and keep it; and there is the ideologue, whose usual purpose is to dispose men's minds for change. (The ideologue is, in another sense, also a kind of man of action). The ruler is never completely committed to any particular theory, but he must (in varying degrees, according to the importance of theory for the people he has to rule) always profess to be orthodox to the theory of the moment, even when he finds it expedient to act counter to it. It is perhaps worth while at this point to mention the difference between the aristocratic ruler (seldom quite so aristocratic as he is imagined to be) who is an extinct type, and the demagogue. Frederick the

Great, to whom Mr. Lewis devotes a chapter of this book, was an aristocratic ruler: with the advantage of being an exceptionally intelligent tyrant over an exceptionally docile people. Frederick the Great was therefore able to be a kind of artist, playing a part for his own amusement and in conformity with his own private and very unpleasant ideal. The modern "dictator," a Hitler or Mussolini, must be thought of rather (I am not professing to interpret Mr. Lewis's opinion but venturing my own) as a highly paid leading actor, whose business is to divert his people (individually, from the spectacle of their own littleness as well as from more useful business). (I wonder whether the more retired life of other dictators, Josef the Terrible or the gentle Salazar, is not perhaps a token that they have more real power). The ruler as dramatic star—with illustrations from the customs of African tribes—is one object of Mr. Lewis's attention.

Of ideologues we find also two kinds: the majority ideologue and the minority ideologue. The former, if he is a big one like Marx, anticipates the way in which things are going; if he is a little one like Mr. Laski or Mr. Strachey, he accepts the current of ideas (not quite the same thing as the current of events) as he finds it. The minority ideologue—a de Maistre, a Bonald, a Maurras, or a Charles Benoist—is against the current; and the best that he can expect is to be hailed some generations later (by people with whom he would likely have little sympathy) as a forerunner. But his purposes are the same (whether his ideas be more or less desirable) as those of the others.

We do not need to believe that Machiavelli was an "ideologue" of either kind. He was in some respects, I believe, rather like Mr. Lewis who writes about him: a mild, detached man, who could never be the dupe of an idea, but who would be rather inefficient in private affairs, the prey of pickpockets, and the recipient of many a leaden half-crown. What gives his book its terrifying greatness is the fact that he *does not seem to care*. He is not advocating anything, he is merely expounding and exposing. He has of course been adopted and made fashionable in Italy (having been a Florentine and having written in the language of Florence) and elsewhere—I suspect that his maxims may be agreeable to our

ferocious friend Mr. A. L. Rowse. But that is because the anti-liberalism which is the offspring of liberalism likes to see itself as consciously cynical and opposed to humbug. Mr. Lewis points out that the emotions actually felt by a Shakespearean hero in real life would be very different from those of his creator; and I think that the emotions of the professed Machiavellian have very little likeness to those of Machiavelli.

As for Mr. Lewis's politics, I see no reason to suppose that he is any more of a "fascist" or "nazi" than I am. People are annoyed by finding that you are not on their side; and if you are not, they prefer you to surrender yourself to the other; if you can see the merits, as well as the faults, of parties to which you do not belong, that is still worse. Anyone who is not enthusiastic about the fruits of liberalism must be unpopular with the anglo-saxon majority. So far as I can see, Mr. Lewis is defending the detached observer. The detached observer, by the way, is likely to be anything but a dispassionate observer; he probably suffers more acutely than the various apostles of immediate action. The detached observers are in theory the philosophers, the scientists, the artists, and the Christians. But most of the people who profess to represent one or another of these categories, are more or less implicated in the politics of their time and place. Philosophy has long since been suspect; and the kind that makes the most voluble pretensions to impartiality may be the most dangerous. The future of the detached observer does not seem to me to be very bright. Perhaps it never was. But the tendencies of what is called "education" to-day seem peculiarly unfavorable to this survival. Anyway it is in the aspect of the detached observer that I have wished to present Mr. Lewis in this note. There has never been a time, surely, when it was more important that the thinker and the artist should endeavour to get outside of their own country and own epoch, an effort which means anything rather than running round all the rest, or settling oneself comfortably in some past age.

Peter Russell

WYNDHAM LEWIS TODAY

Most young men start their literary labours in the attempt to define their attitude to the world around them. The instinct to "impress" other people is an important element also in the psychology of the aspiring author. The young man wishes to write his *Werther*, his unique tremendous personal experience and to impress his fellow men with it. A love of literature almost for its own sake is a further element in the growing writer's makeup, but generally the young are anti-literary, and prefer to use literature for more human purposes.

In these early stages of the young writer's growth there is a serious danger of failure which may be avoided by carefully chosen reading. This threatened failure may be due to the young man's environmental limitations rather than to any internal weakness. Too provincial a family background, too unimaginative a school, too little chance to meet other people and discuss fundamentals with any degree of sophistication, too little fostering of the critical spirit—all these deficiencies may stunt the growth of the young creative writer just at a time when he is most receptive to outside stimuli. Left to himself, dependent not on the genuinely superior experience of helpful friends and teachers but on his own imagined superiority, the young man becomes groundlessly arrogant and conceited, or else unfortunately sentimental or gushing.

A most salutary step forward in the mental development of almost every thinking man (not just my imaginary young man suffering from arrested mental development) is almost certain to result from reading the works of Wyndham Lewis, one of the really massive critical and creative minds of our time. "Truth and Beauty," he says in *The Writer and the Absolute*, "are as much public concerns as the water supply." Truth and Beauty have been this great writer's concern for fifty years; he has not dogmatised about Truth, he has not rambled sentimentally about Beauty, he has followed the true artist's unswerving quest and left behind

him a magnificent volume of works, paintings, drawings, illustrations, writings on philosophy, literature, politics, art, and above all creative works of fiction in which all his remarkable ideas are implicit, and in which standards (which may be symbolized by Truth and Beauty) are a primary concern. His mature, hardboiled but intensely serious nature expresses itself most deeply and explicitly in his novels and short stories. A whole world outlook, consistent and positive, is implicit in these works, an education to men of lesser intellect who look for guidance and an example. No contemporary author seems to me to offer so penetrating an understanding of the facts of contemporary existence or so efficient an armoury against self-deceit and delusion.

In his two most recent books Lewis has brought his full weight to bear on contemporary events, that is, the post war world. In *Rotting Hill* we are given a realistic picture of life in England in the late 1940's, an analysis in the form of fiction, of the decline of living standards in Great Britain. It is sardonic, realistic, a revelation, valid as a work of fiction as well as instructive. Its hard crisp manner may do much to dispel any atmosphere of sentimentality, misplaced idealism or political delusion, without in any way incurring the stigma of inhumane political "reaction." The book is the best analysis of postwar British dreariness that has yet appeared.

The Writer and the Absolute is a more theoretical work, but of more universal application. It is a discussion of the author's relationship with absolute values and his freedom to express them. It contains important attempts to define "freedom" and to compare authors' conditions under different regimes. The third part of the book is given over to a critique of the novels of Sartre, Malraux, Camus and Orwell, and includes a valuable and sobering denunciation of Existentialism as a philosophy.

Wyndham Lewis's books may be strong meat to those who are not well versed in the humanities, but at the worst they will only shatter the complacency of the too-comfortable-in-spirit; at best, they will lead the original and the adventurous to a point from which it may be possible to be constructive in planning a new society; and a place in that society for literature.

Roy Campbell

A NOTE ON W. L.

In England Wyndham Lewis was kept under a virtual boycott for many years, and is still insufficiently recognized. Though not an actual branch of the Civil Service, the Book-trade in England with its ramifications in the Press, is very much like one of the Ministries, say, of Food or Labour, and the authors and reviewers can be compared to the officials, administrative clerks, and chair-borne stamplickers, who issue forms for literary success or failure according as one keeps to the rules and regulations. To generate ideas of one's own was a criminal offence, and still is, though since the War to a lesser degree. One was not allowed to dabble in reality until twenty years after it mattered at all, when self-debunking books like *The God that Failed* are finally allowed to appear.

The only field of mental activity that was free to the so-called "intellectuals" was the vacuous region comprising what was politically or morally unreal: that is to say Utopias and Vices—Socialism and/or Sodomy. Independence of these compulsory qualifications involved one in vicious persecution or complete ostracism: and Lewis and I for many years between the two wars were virtual outlaws because neither of us submitted to atomic fission of the gender but made fun of those who had: and neither of us were such suckers to believe that society can be reformed by equalitarian socialism—*of all things!*

Lewis has shown considerably more courage than I could ever muster by breaking the law *by thinking for himself*, since he is economically vulnerable in every way to the boycotts and conspiracies of the Book-trade and the Press, being an invalid, and one of the oldest inhabitants of Notting Hill Gate, in the thick of the literary jungle which I only raid once a year or so.

The Left-wing writers have now considerably "lost face" in England: the contrast between their fire-eating peace-time belligerence and their war-time poltrooney as chair-borne parasite-troopers in the Knife-and-Fork Brigade was too obvious even for the

British public. So Lewis's great works are automatically regaining recognition, though slowly. He is no longer "the lonely old volcano of the right," as Auden called him. As the self-appointed champion of Romanity, Claudian waged such a fight, in the declining Roman Empire, as Lewis waged in ours on behalf of the Western Culture in which he has latterly ceased to believe. Though Claudian too compromised with the Byzantine State and World Order at the end of his career, it made no difference to the majesty and incalculable value of his great works to those who are trying to save what they can from the wreck of European civilization. I feel the same way about Lewis's great works in Satire, Philosophy, and Criticism.

I don't know if I am supposed to be at loggerheads with W.L., since he sneers at my hobbling gait, due to war wounds, in *Rotting Hill*. My towering superior as a writer and a painter, the ex-Royal Artillery Bombardier apparently feels a little twinge of jealousy for the ex-Sergeant-Major of a crack Commando unit—but that very twinge of very human feeling endears and humanizes this huge, superhuman, intellectual sky-scraper of a genius.

I am very proud that I was privileged to act as his literary body-guard in the days of adversity when he was being mobbed, to collaborate with him in *The Enemy* and in "Satire and Fiction," and to supply the characters of Rob McPhail, Victor Stamp, Zulu Blades, and myself, respectively, in *Snooty Baronet*, *Revenge for Love*, *The Apes of God*, and *Blasting and Bombardiering* and *One Way Song*. Even if in his new mood of despondency, he could outwrite masterpieces like *The Childermass*, *The Lion and the Fox*, and *Time and Western Man*, he could not neutralize their immortal grandeur.

The fact that civil war has become the norm of present and future warfare rather anachronises his idea of *Cosmic Man*, I fear. Ever since the Tower of Babel all attempts at world-federation have only accentuated and developed such petty regionalisms as Scotch, Welsh, Catalan, and Basque sub-nationalism, languages, and costumes—which are the inevitable outcome of such unwieldy growths as United Nations and Towers of Babel. But his

missing of the bus in later years can in no way detract from the prophetic grandeur and sublimity of his greater works which traverse the literature of the first half of this century like a range of Himalayas.

Herbert Marshall McLuhan

WYNDHAM LEWIS: HIS THEORY OF ART AND COMMUNICATION

For thirty years and more Wyndham Lewis has been a one-man army corps opposed to these forces which seek to use art, science, and philosophy in order to reduce our world to the nocturnal womb from which they suppose it to have been born. As he put it in *Time and Western Man*:

For me art is the civilized substitute for magic; as philosophy is what, on a higher or more complex plane, takes the place of religion. By means of art, I believe Professor Whitehead and M. Brémond wish to lead us down and back to the plane of magic, or mystical, specifically religious, experience.

The recent *Gate of Horn* by G. R. Levy presents the Greek effort to devise a civilized substitute for magic. The later dialogues of Plato "are in general of an Orphic or Pythagorean colour."

There are the cosmic cycles, the harmony of the spheres, necessity with her whirling spindle at the centre of existence, the Judgment of the Dead, the Waters of Remembrance and Forgetfulness, and the soul's imprisonment in the Cave. In general they describe the fall from and the return to divine life.

Plato's theory of Ideas institutes a gigantic effort to establish the mystic doctrine upon an intellectual basis. The relation of created things to "the pattern laid up in heaven" is, as we saw, that *methexis*, or participation, which Aristotle equated with *mimesis*, the "imitation" by which the living world was built upon the Pythagorean numbers. Thus the relationship created by the earliest man, and the means of his growth as already described; the vehicle of the first-known religion, is now made articulate. The wheel has come full-circle.

From this point of view Greek Philosophy and science were a means of arresting the wheel of existence or of delivering us from the time mechanism of existence. In the opinion of Wyndham Lewis, that is the function of art as well. There is no need to immerse ourselves again in the destructive element of the Time

flux or to return to that "Primitive Past saturated with blood and incest so generally favoured." We have, as *Finnegans Wake* also proclaims, the means to awaken permanently from the repetitive nightmare of history. This is also the basis of the Lewis attack on Spengler:

We are perhaps in the last phases of greek "progress"—phases that are extremely ungreek, however. Progress may even itself bring Progress to an end. Indeed, already the bottom seems to be entirely knocked out of Spengler's "historical" periodic picture by such things as wireless, air-travel and so forth—actually by progress itself. How *can*, in fact, the old competitive "rising" and "declining" clashing of crowds of rival states, continue at all, unless science is abolished, or else unless that state of historical rivalry is artificially maintained?

We have, then, to consider that modern technology is itself mainly a product of art. It is explicitly the rival of the primitive artist. For it has been the prime characteristic of science and philosophy since Newton and Kant, that they seek to control the world rather than to understand it. We can, they say, control by magical formula what necessarily eludes our understanding or comprehension. The artist was always a magician in this sense. But the civilized artist has differed from the primitive artist in seeking to arrest the flux of existence in order that the mind may be united with that which is permanent in existence. Whereas the modern artist has used his factive or creative intelligence to manipulate matter and experience into a pattern which could arrest the mind in the presence of a particular aspect of existence, the modern scientist has sought to merge the functions of the primitive and civilized magicians. He has developed formulas for the control of the material world and then applied these to the control of the human mind. He invades the human mind and society with his patterned information. That is the key to the nature of the new "mass media."

In recent years Lewis returned to this theme in *America and Cosmic Man* in which he took America as the laboratory in which was being produced the new ahistoric man. His attacks on the romancers of Progress and the romancers of the Past have this single aim, to deliver us from the bondage of primitive religion

with its obsession with recurrence, and the way of destruction as the way of rebirth. And it has been his sense of equal menace presented to any living present by the cultist of East and West that has procured his exclusion from the public attention which they control.

Shelley, says Whitehead, "thinks of nature as changing, dissolving, transforming as it were at a fairy's touch. . . . this is one aspect of Nature, the elusive change . . . a change of inward character. That is where Shelley places his emphasis."

And that, Lewis points out, is where Whitehead, Bergson, Spengler, and their school place their emphasis. But, continues Whitehead, there is another aspect of nature, namely its opposite. And Lewis comments: "Wordsworth, we are told, because he was born upon a hill, saw the other aspect of nature. He is the poet of endurance. And Spengler tells us that all Greeks, whether born on a hill or elsewhere, always had the misfortune to see that side of the medal—the enduring and concrete as opposed to the changing."

Such is also the misfortune of Wyndham Lewis. But it is important for an understanding of his vortex view of art and civilization to notice his insistence that the world of Space as opposed to the world of memory and history is the world of a "pure Present." "The world of the 'pure Present' of the Classical Ages is obviously the world that is born and dies every moment." By comparison with the intensity that is revealed in the contemplation of this spatial reality, the vision of the Time mind, argues Lewis, is that of the sentimental tourist:

The pretentious omniscience of the "historical" intelligence makes of it an eternal dilettante, or tourist. It does not live in, it is *en touriste*, that is tastes its time-district, or time-climate . . . This mental world becomes for it an interminable time-preserve, laid out for critical, disembodied journeyings.

A striking illustration of his point occurs in *The Lion and the Fox*. In Renaissance Italy:

The prince or commander of an army of a state had often started as a free captain. . . . we can agree that it must have been "singular to see these men—generally of low origin and devoid of culture—surrounded in their camps by ambassadors, poets and learned men, who read to them Livy and Cicero, and orig-

inal verses in which they were compared to Scipio and Hannibal, to Caesar and Alexander." But they were all acting on a tiny scale the past that was being unearthed. . . . With the more intelligent of them like Caesar Borgia, this archaeological and analogic habit of mind assumed the proportion of a mania. His *Aut Caesar aut nihil* is the same type of literature as is concentrated in the small maniacal figure of Julien Sorel, Stendhal's little domestic Napoleon. . . . For every type of relatively small adventurer there was an antique model. . . . They attempted to bring to life the heroes of antiquity, and recall in their own lives the events recorded in the codices, and it was this immediate application of everything to life in Italian Renaissance society (like the substitution of a cinema for a history-book in a school) that made the Italian influence so vivid in the rest of Europe. Renaissance Italy was very exactly a kind of Los Angeles where historical scenes were tried out, antique buildings imitated and roughly run up, and dramatic crimes reconstructed.

In a word, Lewis's attitude to the Time-and-psychology-enchanted Bergsonian and Proustian 20th Century extends to the Renaissance. Along with T. E. Hulme he would substitute for the naturalistic values of that era those of the ahistoric cultures of Egypt and Byzantium. He is not enchanted by gimcrack approximations to past grandeur:

When, as in the present age, life loses its exterior beauty, and all the ritual of grandeur has become extinct, the intellect and character everywhere deteriorates. "It is always the form that imposes the fact. But in its turn the form originates in some fancy or desire that seeks a ceremonious expression, just as an ardent mind seeks for itself a personal expression in some suitable medium."

It is the magical form of Shakespeare's verse which evokes the leonine splendors of his heroes:

. . . the poetry overwhelms the prose: the chivalry substitutes itself for the self-interest, a mystical religion for a "scientific truth," the Lion for the Fox.

Lewis's theory of art and communication is a traditional one. The hero, the genius, is a god-intoxicated man. He communes with the noumenal world. And the contrast of this knowledge with the misery of his human condition constitutes his dementia or madness:

It is as outcasts, as men already in a sense out of life, and divested of the functional machinery of their roles... Lear, Hamlet, Timon, Thersites, and so forth are in the position of disincarnate spirits, but still involved with and buffeted by life. Their "truth" is an angry one usually, but they have the advantage of having no "axe to grind."

Thersites is always in that unfortunate position! Lear and Hamlet only become so when they grow demented: ... we assume that if undisturbed by calamity they would be respectable members of society, and not have, much less express, all these horrible thoughts. It is this assumption of conditions that do not exist at all in the plays... that is usually the basis of English Shakespearian criticism.

The sense in which Lewis envisages his artist as genius and as the Enemy also appears in another passage from *The Lion and the Fox*:

The child is made to feel that the individual in himself or in herself is the enemy. The death or subjection of that enemy is the task of the child. He must deaden himself before engaging as a qualified human being in the world-wide occupation of making life mechanical and uniform, and fit for even the vastest herd to live in.

Honour is not your own "good" for there is no you. Honour is a faculty of the gentleman: Its exercise consists in doing as much for somebody else (for the Not-You) as is consistent with the natural reluctance to do anything of the sort, and where the circumstances ensure complete safety: in order to get the maximum for yourself, while pretending all the while that the self does not exist, and that the Not-You (or you might say the NOT) does.

The artist, gifted with mania from above, is always confronted with the great collective mania from below:

But without the scientific organization of revolution... men have always had this much wider instinct for the divine—that is of course, the instinct to destroy it, isolate it, or corrupt it to their uses. In a time when there is no accredited divinity, or "divine right," left, it is in a sense easier to observe the universal operation of this instinct... So that dark competitive self, in the smallest organism, that makes it murderous, becomes organized into the type of herd-war against the head, where almost anything high, unusual and unassimilable is sighted... It is the person wrenched out of the organic context by the

impulses of some divine ferment, and this being suddenly appearing free, that is the signal for those dispensations and adjustments, culminating in his pathos . . .

It must be remembered that human beings are congeries of parasites subsisting on the Individual, subsisting on a very insufficient supply of Individuals. . . . And anything representing the principle of individuality they attack On the back of every great human intelligence there are millions of contingent forms, which it propels and feeds. The relations subsisting between this lonely host and the organisms to whom he is appropriated is not very marked by a warm mutual sympathy.

In considering the meaning for art and communication of this war of the collective puppetry against the individual person there is another passage in G. R. Levy's *The Gate of Horn* which indicates the traditional bearings of the position:

Plato's theory of Ideas constitutes a gigantic effort to establish the mystic doctrine upon an intellectual basis. . . . But it must be noted that Plato's Ideas are of two kinds, and both of the nature of the Soul. Like daemons, some of whom are conceived as descending as watchers from the higher spheres of being, and others as rising from the body or group, but infected by it, and so always drawn back into incarnation. . . .

This would seem to be the basis of Lewis's distinction between the space-mind and the Time-ridden mentality. As he writes in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist*:

If you conclude from this that I am treading the road to the platonic heaven, my particular road is deliberately chosen for the immanent satisfaction that may be found by the way. You may know Schopenhauer's eloquent and resounding words, where, in his forcible fashion, he is speaking of what art accomplishes: "It therefore pauses at this particular thing: the course of time stops: the relations vanish for it: only the essential, the idea is its object." . . . A sort of immortality descends upon these objects. It is an immortality, which, in the case of painting, they have to pay for with death, or at least with its coldness and immobility.

That is, the moment of art is not a moment of time's covenant. And art emotion is specifically that experience of arrest in which we pause before a particular thing or experience. It is also, at such moments, the sense of disproportion between our mental and

our physical dimensions from which Lewis derives his view both of the tragic and the comic:

It is to feel that our consciousness is bound up with this non-mechanical phenomenon of life; that, although helpless in the face of the material world, we are in some way superior to and independent of it; and that our mechanical imperfection is the symbol of that. In art we are in a sense playing at being what we designate as matter. We are entering the forms of the mighty phenomena around us, and seeing how near we can get to being a river or a star, without actually becoming that. . . . The game consists in seeing how near you can get, without the sudden extinction and neutralization that awaits you as matter, or as the machine. In our bodies we have got already so near to extinction.

This provides the perfect view of the great Lewis line in painting and his watchful game with his characters in fiction. It is a perpetual poise on a razor's edge. It explains at once his lack of enthusiasm not only for Bergson's passionate merging with the Time flux, but his scepticism about Eliot's doctrine of impersonality in art. The above views also help to explain that affinity which Lewis has with Dostoevsky despite the superficial lack of resemblance between the great Romantic and the Lewis stylization. As he himself suggests in *The Lion and the Fox*, apropos of Falstaff and Don Quixote:

Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Timon are all demented or hallucinated, as so many of the celebrated figures in nineteenth century Russian fiction were. It is the supreme liberty it is possible to take with your material. That it should be so often taken in the case of the great characters of dramatic fiction is the most evident testimony to the dependence on untruth, in every sense, in which our human nature and environment put us. In the case of Muishkin, Dostoevsky had to call in express and abnormal physiological conditions to help him incarnate his saint. And the heightening everywhere in Shakespeare is by way of madness. Since it is made to behave in the way the hero does, he has to be maddened by some means or other more often than not in order to make him at all probable.

The hero, in short, is, as such, a type of mania from above and a type of the misery as well as of the grandeur of the human condition. Along these lines it would be easy to establish the affinities not

only between Lewis and Dostoevsky but between Lewis and Swift.

His theory of the comic as stated in *The Wild Body* is the exact reverse of the Bergsonian theory of laughter:

The root of the comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a thing behaving like a person. But from that point of view all men are necessarily comic: for they are all things, or physical bodies, behaving as persons. It is only when you come to deny that they are "persons" or that there is any "mind" or "person" there at all, that the world of appearance is accepted as quite natural, and not at all ridiculous. Then, with the denial of "the person," life becomes immediately both "real" and very serious.

In a word, life is always serious for Bergson because our personal reality depends not on moments of detachment from the flux but on moments when we are merged in it. Lewis, on the contrary, adopts the Schopenhauer intellectualism in seeing the movements of vision as an arrest and detachment of the great mechanism of the world as will and idea: "moments of vision are blurred rapidly, and the poet sinks into the rhetoric of the will." And "no man has ever continued to live who has observed himself in that manner for longer than a flash. Such consciousness must be of the nature of a thunderbolt. Laughter is only summer-lightning. But it occasionally takes on the dangerous form of absolute revelation."

Between this view and the earlier quotation concerning art as a game played on the edge of the abyss of extinction, it is possible to get a very adequate image of Lewis's activity as painter and novelist. He is a mystic or visionary of the comic, moving toward the pole of intelligibility instead of that of feeling. Joyce establishes a similar distinction in his notebooks as quoted by Gorman,

When tragic art makes my body to shrink terror is not my feeling because I am urged from rest, and moreover this art does not show me what is grave, I mean what is constant and irremediable in human fortunes, nor does it unite me with the secret cause . . . Terror and pity, finally are aspects of sorrow comprehended in sorrow—the feeling which the privation of some good excites in us.

In short, Joyce tends like Lewis to reject the way of connatural

gnosis and emotion favored by Bergson, Eliot and theosophy, in which the emotions are used as the principal windows of the soul. And Joyce continues "... but a comedy (a work of comic art) which does not urge us to seek anything beyond itself excites in us the feeling of joy. . . . For beauty is a quality of something seen but terror and pity and joy are states of mind." Joyce, that is, argues that beauty is entirely of intellectual apprehension whereas the passions or states of mind are gnostic windows of the soul which cause us to be merged with that particular quality. The intellectual, comic perception is for Lewis what beauty is for Joyce. But so far as the term "beauty" goes Lewis identifies it with "ideal conditions for an organism," much as Burke does in *The Sublime and the Beautiful*. Compared with Joyce, however, there is in Lewis a manichean abjuration of delectation.

But Joyce, Lewis, Eliot, and Pound are perhaps nearer in agreement on the subject of the vortices of existence. If "the world of the 'pure present' of the Classical Ages is obviously the world that is born and dies every moment," it is clear that it is such a world that Lewis seeks to arrest in his paintings (and novels), especially in that "creation myth" which appears in this issue of *Shenandoah*. If we can elucidate the vortex concepts in Lewis we shall be finally in a position to see his grounds for rejecting the thought and work of the Time and Flux school of this century. At first glance it might seem that Lewis was a candidate for the same school in being the observer of a "world that is born and dies every moment." But there is even at that level the habit of the observer substituted for the sympathetic meger. In place of the gnostic and nostalgic contemplation of flowers that give thoughts too deep for tears, Lewis would just as soon "say it with locomotives." In *Wyndham Lewis the Artist* he writes:

In the case of a dynamic shape like an aeroplane there is neither any reason nor any need for the collaboration of engineer and artist. All such machines, except for their colouring, or some surface design, to modify their shape, develop in accordance with a law of efficient evolution as absolute as that determining the shape of the tiger, the wasp, or the swallow. They are definitely, for the artist, in the category of animals. When we come to the static cell-structures (houses) in which we

pass our lives there is far more latitude and opportunity for his inventiveness.

That is to say, Lewis is not without affinities with Samuel Butler, who viewed the evolutionary impulses as existing in an accelerated form in machinery. But Lewis is not much interested in the time vistas of evolution if only because:

The artist goes back to the fish. The few centuries that separate him from the savage are a mere flea-bite to the distance his memory must stretch if it is to strike the fundamental slime of creation. And those are the conditions—the very first gust of creation in this scale of life in which we are set that he must reach, before he, in his turn, can create!

The creation of a work of art is an act of the same description as the evolution of wings on the sides of a fish, the feathering of its fins; or the invention of a weapon within the body of a hymenopter to meet the terrible needs of its life. The ghostly and burning growths—the walking twigs and flying stones—the two anguished notes that are the voice of a being—the vapid twitter; the bellows of age-long insurrection and discontent—the complacent screech—all these may be considered as types of art, all equally perfect, but not all equally desirable.

Corresponding to this notion of creativity is Lewis's theory of communication:

For what the artist's public has to be brought to do is to see its world, and the people in it, as a stranger would. There have been so far principally two methods of achieving this. One is to display a strange world to the spectator, and yet one that has so many analogies to his that, as he looks, startled, into attention by an impressive novelty, he sees his own reality through this veil, as it were, momentarily in truer colours. The other method is the less objective one of luring the spectator to the point from which, inevitably, the world will appear as the artist sees it, and the spectator from that point of vantage paints the picture for himself, but with the artist's colours and his more expert eyes. The first of these methods can be described very roughly as the impersonal and objective method, and the second as the personal and subjective one. The latter method (contrary to what is sometimes supposed) seems to be more assured of a positive result: for a lesser effort of intelligence is required on the part of the public. . . . The artist, unless of a very lucky or privileged description, can only exist even, by pretending to be one of the audience. Nothing

less democratic than that will be tolerated. . . . Bergson's view that the permanence of the work of art, or its continued interest for us, depends on its uniqueness, on the fact that such and such a thing will never happen again, would make of everything in life a work of art.

Lewis has made plain enough what he considers to be the relation between the artist and nature. He holds the traditional view of imitation as working in the way that nature works, so that art is another nature: "As much of the material poetry of Nature as the plastic vessel will stand should be taken up into the picture. Nowadays though when Nature finds itself expressed so universally in specialized mechanical counterpart, and cities have modified our emotions, the plastic vessel, paradoxically, is more fragile. The less human it becomes, the more delicate from this point of view." That suggests that as more and more of the actual material world has been brought under the manipulation of the global art of applied science, and as our emotions are attenuated by the impact of these artifacts, the balance of the individual artist becomes more precarious. It is, naturally, in relation to the artist's operating in the way that nature works that brings Lewis to a direct statement of his notion of the vortex:

Da Vinci recommends you to watch and be observant of the grains and markings of wood, the patterns found in Nature everywhere. The patterned grains of stones, marble, etc., the fibres of wood, have a rightness and inevitability that is similar to the rightness with which objects arrange themselves in life—the objects upon your work-table, for instance. . . . the finest artists—and this is what Art means—are those men who are so trained and sensitized that they have a perpetually renewed power of doing what Nature does, only doing it with all the beauty of accident, without the certain futility that accident implies.

It is in this sense that art for Lewis appears as a natural vortex of patterned energy, presenting us with creative cores or vortices of causality. In the heart of these cores or vortices there is an absolute calm, but at the periphery there is violence and the unmistakable character of great energy. These "untumultuous vortices of power" are at the center of every vital work of art as they are

in any vital civilization. And it is presumably the view of Lewis that the role of the artist in society is to energise it by establishing such intellectually purified images of the entelechy of nature. The alternative mode is the swoon upon death, the connatural merging in the indiscriminate flux of life, the reflexive feeling and expressing of one's time. It is Lewis's constant theme that the art of our time has chosen the second mode and that its *Mona Lisa* appeal is to the death swoon.

WYNDHAM LEWIS

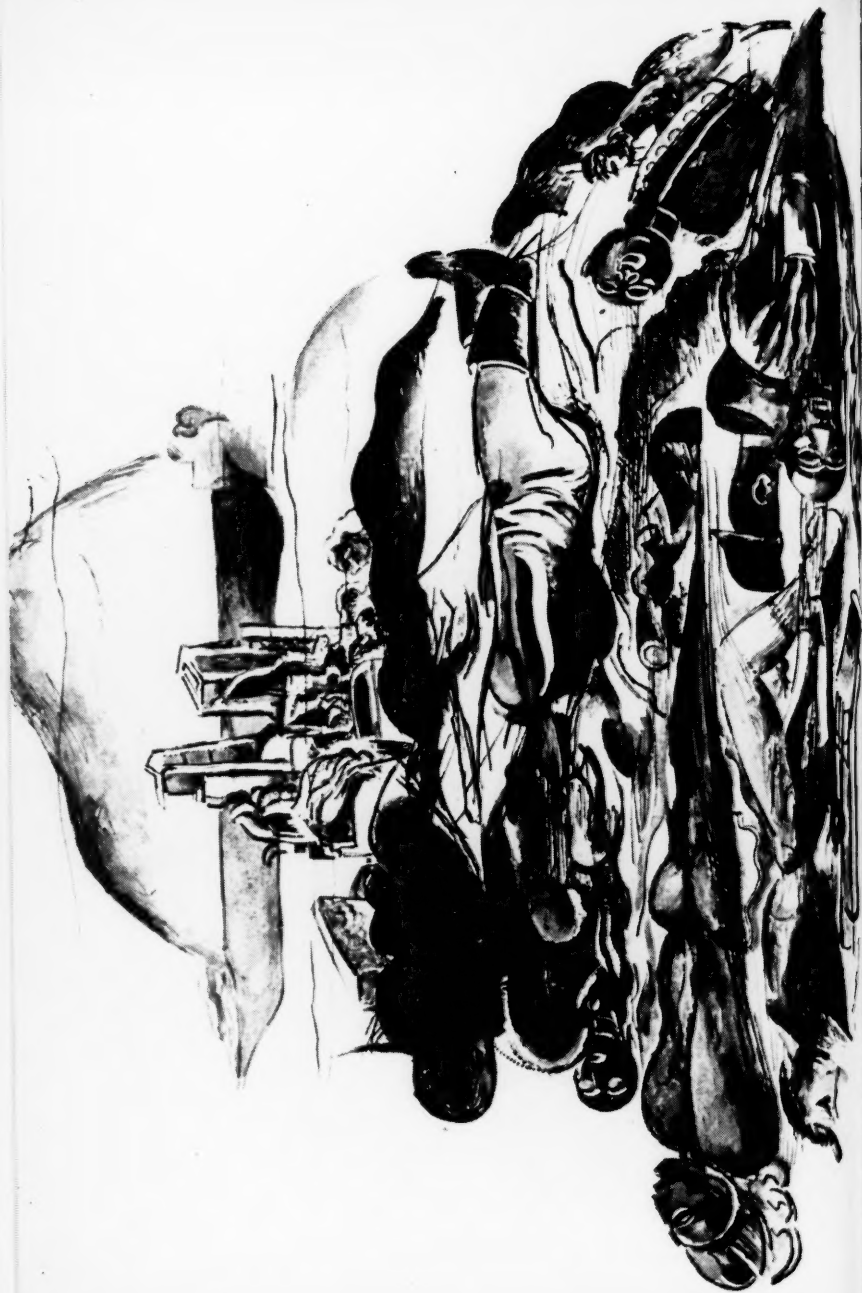




XXI







Photographs of the works of Mr. Lewis listed below were made available through the courtesy of Mr. Douglas Duncan.

1

WYNDHAM LEWIS: *Creation Myth No. 17*—Water-color, chalk and pencil—19 3/4x13 1/2 inches—1941—Collection of Douglas Duncan

2

WYNDHAM LEWIS: *Pietà*—Inks and water-color—13 1/2x10 inches—1941—Collection of J. S. McLean

3

WYNDHAM LEWIS: *Witch on Cowback*—Chalk and water-color—11x16 inches—1941—Collection of Douglas Duncan

4

WYNDHAM LEWIS: *Two Women on a Bench*—Pastel on blue paper—16x12 inches—Collection of Douglas Duncan

5

WYNDHAM LEWIS: *Lebensraum*—11 3/4x17 3/4 inches—1941—Art Gallery of Toronto



PAVO

M. T. STAMPALIA

Aquatint—Lift Ground

1953

Edwin Watkins

A Season

Spring at first lightly hazes, as if smoke
Rose on its limbs, so rare
Are the leaf-blades, that hardly on the air
Float or twine; as flowers may be curled
On flowers, without binding, in a yoke
To lie soft on a girl.

If they came silently, leaf on leaf ring
Not half aloud: a voice
Deft as the wind summons to rehearse
Its later trouble, that will see them laid;
Pile leaf on leaf, like dry tongues clamoring,
Into one crowded bed.

Make much of the season, each girl or boy.
Wind easy as a breath
Finds out configurations of the leaf
That hardly meet your notice, till they change.
So weave your garland that it easy lie
As dew, when it begins.

Richard K. Thorman

Some Saints and Others

The stock exchange is cold
And all the money men gone home sadly;
Ladies of the street have come to watch
La Reine de Saba run home to Solomon,
There will be no inheritors of this;
Snow flicks and dies on the empty window frames,
The city sleeps and all its ministers.

In the strictest logic now suppose
Three saints on the snowy scene
Whose painted world does not disclose,
Thorn or rose, where they convene.
Their farthest sight contains my expose.

The rough edge of scandal will preserve
Them from their wicked senses five times five;
An effort after virtue redefines
Proposals in a mild tautology.

In blue-shot silk the queen begins her dance,
Wheel and bend the music never ends;
The light slips, reverses from her dress,
Falls and trembling glows on dry bones.
A sound of crystal breaking clear and small
Till only green-eyed ladies light the dark.
Such likeness in her heart betrays the queen.

The gentlest fantasy admits
Kinesthetic elements for saints
Or money men; their eyes are too much turned.
The dancer and the dance reject their bond
Before the music finds analogies:
Earth and heaven deny increase of life
To these, the flagellates, the pitched past night.

Anthony Harrigan

The Marsh

From Wallace river to Caw Caw swamp
The marsh is smooth as old mahogany,
A vast table fashioned of broad leaves.
The marsh grass surges like waves at sea.
The spirit of the centuries abides here still
Amid the crumbling ricefield banks
As the busy, unruly sun stabs through
The long winter afternoons. Live oaks
Are bearded with age. Each protects a wild pig
That pushes a snout beneath a great tree's roots.

Here everything is morass. The evil-smelling mud
Is rich with death and soft decay,
With rotting cypress trunks, like mummies
Underground, and alligator bones.
Here primeval nature regains sway.
All day slimy waters course
Down gutters of the marsh,
Down the Stono river past the oyster beds.
The waters wear the marsh away;
To the edge of the earth the waters run.

James Merrill

A Timepiece

Of a pendulum's mildness, with her feet up
My sister lay expecting her third child.
Over the sag of the hammock spilled
Her flushed face, grazing clover and buttercup.

Her legs were troubling her, a vein had burst.
Even so, among lesser fullnesses she lay
Of pecked damson, of daughters at play
Who in the shadow of the house rehearsed

Her gait, her gesture, unnatural to them
—Yet they would master it in time, grown tall
Trusting that out of themselves came all
That full grace; while she out whom these came

Shall have thrust fullness from her like a death.
Already, seeing the little girls listless
She righted herself in a new awkwardness.
It was not *her* life she was heavy with.

Let us each have some milk, my sister smiled
Meaning to muffle with the taste
Of unbuilt bones a striking in her breast,
For soon by what it tells the clock is stilled.

Donald Davie

LANDOR AS POET

Hugh Kenner has asked, speaking of Ezra Pound, "why is his poetry so little discussed and, one suspects, less read?" And he goes on to say, "The same question might be asked of Ben Jonson, Landor, and Browning, who languish today in the shade of, respectively, Shakespeare, Shelley, and Tennyson, as Pound in the shade of Eliot."¹ This question, as it relates to Landor, is the one I propose to answer.

It is sufficiently clear how Hugh Kenner would answer it. One may note in Landor what Mr. Kenner notes in Pound, "his multilingual erudition, his orientation towards politics rather than psychology, his exact critical sense issuing in precise, unequivocal, but apparently random judgments, his abrupt handling of fools." Add to these observations Pound's complimentary (though oddly ambiguous) references to Landor, in the *A. B. C. of Reading*, for instance, and the case for Landor begins to write itself. The way is clear for applauding Landor's poetry, as Eliot applauds Jonson's and as Kenner applauds Pound's, as "poetry of the surface" in no derogatory sense, which is under-rated by the common reader, as Jonson's is, and Pound's because it does not arouse "swarms of inarticulate feelings." In short, now that Kenner and others have begun to do justice to Pound, it seems as if Landor's stock is likely to rise in sympathy. I should like to scotch this tendency before it starts, because it seems to me (to come clean at the start) that this parallel is deceptive, that Landor cannot and should not bulk so large beside Shelley, as Browning should by Tennyson, or Pound by Eliot. This is not to say however that the state of public taste, where Landor is concerned, is very well as it is. A revaluation is called for, and it is time justice was done to Landor; but we don't do that by over-rating him.

Hugh Kenner provides another lead. It concerns Landor's

¹Hugh Kenner. *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, p. 18.

hellenism. Kenner is commenting on Pound's note about the limitations of Greek aesthetic "which would seem to consist wholly in plastic, or in plastic moving towards coitus . . .;" and we are reminded,

This hot and heavy side of the Greek world . . . is most easily accessible to English-reading inspection in the young Keats. The breathing and panting that infects even the *Odes* goes with what were in his own day called Keats' "Cockney" affiliations, with his passion for a clutter of objects d'art, with the fashionable *nouveau-riche* feeling, shortly after the Industrial Revolution, that passion was fleeting and fading, and that "culture" must be hurriedly purchased from dealers in great shipments, urns and statues, and stuck up around the garden. Much nineteenth-century Hellenism was related to the Romantic fever in this way.²

Now Landor's hellenism is plainly not of this "hot and heavy" sort, though Landor himself nowhere challenges the Keatsian pretensions. But I am not sure that it is any better, or even so good. It might be maintained that Landor's hellenism is of an older marmoreal sort, which may be more "chaste" but is just for that reason much further from the Greek reality. And even if we take the Keatsian hellenism on Kenner's terms, we perceive that it has some relation to nineteenth-century England; it has ethical implications and is an attitude to life, in London c. 1820 as in Periclean Athens. Landor's, by contrast, is purely an aesthetic manoeuvre, a feature of the surface in the wrong sense, literary in the wrong sense, smelling of the museum and the library.³

Just for this reason, Landor's hellenism is easily manageable by the critic, because it breaks down readily into sources and influences, and the imitation of various classical models. These models vary according to genres, and I distinguish the genres as does Stephen Wheeler in his admirable standard edition of the

²*Ibid.*, p. 240.

³A dishonest critic could make play here with *Gebir*, Book II, where there is an account of the excavation of a buried city. The product of each day's excavations vanishes by magic in the night. One could argue that this is "culture" in the shape of Athenian marbles. But as I shall argue, the verse of *Gebir* just isn't good enough to sustain this interpretation. And in fact Landor approved of Elgin.

Poetical Works, under the headings of "Heroic Poems" (with which Wheeler includes a couple of the so-called *Hellenics*), the *Hellenics* themselves, the Epigrams (including the love-poems), and the Dramas. I shall briefly consider each of these in turn, in this order.

In the heroic poems, Landor's hellenism is first and foremost Pindaric—"If I could resemble Pindar in nothing else, I was resolved to be as compendious and exclusive." C. H. Herford's comments on this⁴ can lead only to confusion. For by "compendious and exclusive," Landor means something more than "restraint" and conspicuous austerity. He means what the 17th and 18th Centuries mean by "strength," a quality of syntactical compactness, what Johnson calls (in the "Life of Denham," which is a *locus classicus* of the tradition) "exhibiting the sentiment with more weight than bulk." The importance of this principle for Dryden, Pope and Cowper (to name no more) has never been properly acknowledged. By Landor's day the tradition was all but lost, and when Byron and Jeffreys speak of "strength," they mean something quite different and vaguer, a shrill forcefulness, a quality of ardent élan. Landor uses the term frequently, always in the old sense. Of a half-dozen examples I have noted, in prose and verse, I give one, from the Preface to *Gebir* (1798):

I have written in blank verse, because there never was a poem in rhyme that grew not tedious in a thousand lines. My choice is undoubtedly the most difficult [sic] of the two: for, how many have succeeded in rhyme, in the structure at least; how few comparatively in blank verse. There is Akenside, there is, above all, the poet of our republic. But in most others we meet with stiffness instead of strength, and weakness instead of ease.

What stamps this "strength" as belonging to the tradition is its opposition to "ease": the two terms went together in this way, not only for Dryden and Pope, but earlier still, for Godolphin and Hobbes.

It will be agreed, I suppose, that syntactical compactness is one of the features of pre-Romantic verse, the loss of which we most deplore in the Romantic poets. And, other things being

⁴C. H. Herford. *The Age of Wordsworth*, pp. 272-273.

equal, if Landor's practice tallies with his theory in this particular, we shall be inclined to applaud him for it. "Compactness" however is Cowper's word; and it is important to distinguish it, for practical purposes, from "concentration," which, as normally used today, is a matter of overtones and ambiguities. Strength has nothing to do with this, and except in the hands of the master, Pope, "compactness" seems to preclude "concentration." Landor belongs with those who go after compactness rather than concentration. And this is another way of saying that, in intention at any rate, his poetry is Jonsonian, of the surface; the "inarticulate feelings" swarm round the other sort of verse, feeding on overtones.

But there is Landor's reference to "the poet of our republic." If Pindar is his first master in heroic verse, Milton is his second. And this explains why, in practice, Landor's "strength" is not, after all, the strength of Dryden, of Pope, of Cowper and of Jonson. Their strength was the "strength of Denham" (see Johnson's Life); Landor's is the strength of Milton. The compactness of their syntax is always within reach of the compactness possible to careful English speech; Landor's is a compactness proper only to an inflected language:

Ambiguous was it from the field or town
Whether she tore the youth away (her hand
Holding his spear through terror at the wrath
Of sire and prophet) or his arm made firm
Her step precipitous: but she was first
Where the road narrowed, fit for one alone,
And he where, leaning down for her, his spear
Protruded helped her up the rock abrupt

This is from "Catillus and Salia," Landor's translation, published in *Hellenics* (1847), of a poem which he wrote originally in Latin and so published in 1820. (Wheeler prints it however, rightly I think, with the Heroic Poems.) Here is another example:

Clearly I discern
What Fate before had hidden; nor retreat;
Nor arms, wherever they may lead, refuse;
Nor absence . . . long, for ever; nor the gulph
Of Styx, which all must pass; nor, what is worse,
In other lands to wander; be thou

Mine for one day, O Salia! no one's else
And least of any one an exile's bride!

Here the effort after syntactical compactness over-reaches itself and becomes muscle-bound in academic dialect. Nor is this a consequence of the poem's first composition in Latin. For, to find the most extraordinary examples of this sort of thing, we go to the early heroic pieces, *Gebir*, *Gunlang and Helga*, and *Crysaor*. From the last, much admired by Herford, comes the following:

... men wrong
By their prostrations, prayers, and sacrifice,
Either the gods, the rulers, or themselves:
But flame and thunder fright them from the Gods,
Themselves, they cannot, dare not—they are ours,
Us—dare they, can they, us?

It is not necessary to go further before agreeing with Pound that most of Landor's longer poems deserve to be unread, because they are so far from any conceivable English speech.

But we cannot leave it there, for Landor can do better than this and sometimes achieves strength at no expense to clarity:

He would have thought his fate accurst
To meet her as he met her first,
So, madly swang the sounding door,
And reacht, and reaching left, the shore.

This is from *Gunlang and Helga*; in the same grand manner is the line from the later editions of *Gebir*:

Possess the ocean, me, thyself, and peace

Plainly, here there is distinction of a sort. It is one mode of what the older critics chorused about in Landor, the "sculpturesque." It is the striking of attitudes in the poetry by locutions of unusual compactness. And it is hardly consistent for Landor, so partial to this type of expression, to censure Milton wherever he finds a pun (as he does in his *Imaginary Conversation with Southey*); for these locutions are themselves certainly of the nature of puns. Moreover, in the same *Conversation*, Landor insists that in heroic poems the action is more important than the moral. Yet whenever this "sculpturesque" appears ("statuesque" is nearer the

mark⁵) the action stops while some actor holds an attitude. The pole-vaulter stays poised above the bar; then the projector whirs again and he returns to earth. The newsreel is repeatedly interrupted; it jerks from one set-piece to another. Hence Landon's heroic verse is insidiously quotable. Lines that are splended when quoted are seen, when returned to their context, to be preening themselves, holding a striking pose.

This must be insisted on, because otherwise, when Pound censures Landon for writing in dialect, it may seem that Landon's achievement is equal to Milton's, who is open of course to the same accusation of treating English as if it were inflected. But at least in Milton the verse is of a piece, the convention is consistent, and the action uninterrupted; whereas Landon's is slung between peaks of strength, jerking from one impressive "still" to another.

Thus the Miltonic parallel (Landon invites and challenges it) can it be pushed further. Malcolm Elwin remarks:

It was a failing of Landon's which helped to prompt Coleridge to wonder what he lacked to become a true poet, to insert lines of disturbing pathos among otherwise beautiful verse . . .⁶

What Coleridge said, in fact, was this:

What is it that Mr. Landon wants, to make him a poet? His powers are certainly very considerable, but he seems totally deficient in that modifying faculty, which compresses several units into one whole. The truth is, he does not possess imagination in its highest form—that of stamping *il più nell' uno*. Hence his poems, taken as wholes, are unintelligible; you have eminences excessively bright, and all the ground around between them in darkness. Besides which, he has never learned, with all his energy, how to write simple and lucid English.

Elwin's absurd gloss on this shows how dangerous it is to try to cut the Coleridgean cackle. He is never so "wooly" as he seems to be. His judgment on Landon reaches back into metaphysics and psychology and the principle of the *esemplastic* imagination; but it reaches forward into the body of Landon's verse, where it can be

⁵cf. Stephen A. Larrabee. *English Bards and Grecian Marbles*, pp. 290, 291. See chapter X of this work for a fuller and more sympathetic account of this element in Landon's verse.

⁶Malcolm Elwin. *Savage Landon*, p. 20

endorsed in the most straightforward fashion. Return to its context the line just quoted from *Gebir*, and the passage runs like this:

Weep not thy country: weep not caves abhorr'd,
Dungeons and portals that obscure the day.
Gebir—tho' generous, just, humane—inhaled
Rank venom from these mansions. Rest O King
In Egypt thou! nor, Tamar! pant for sway.
With horrid chorus, Pain, Diseases, Death,
Stamp on the slippery pavement of the great,
And ring their sounding emptiness thro' earth.
Possess the ocean, me, thyself, and peace.

Are Pain, Diseases and Death in danger of falling down, stamping as they do on a pavement so slippery? Obviously not: at least, that was not Landor's intention. The pavement is slippery to the powerful; to Pain, Diseases, and Death, it is a sounding-board. To Landor these two images are distinct, and he seems not to have realized that they might infect each other. And this is typical: Landor sees each image as a unit, and never takes care that his poem shall be more than the sum of its parts. De Quincey noticed only one aspect of this deficiency when he wrote, echoing another Coleridge tag:

The fact is, that no mere description, however visual and picturesque, is in any instance poetic *per se*, or except in and through the pasison which presides. Among our writers of eminent genius, who have too often submitted, if not sacrificed, the passion to picturesque beauty, one of the principal is Mr. Landor, especially in his *Gebir*.⁷

Coleridge's pronouncement goes beyond this, and rightly. For the break-down between the images is only one aspect of a more general inability to inform and subdue. De Quincy himself quotes from *Count Julian*⁸ a passage which he much admires, but he suggests a re-arrangement of lines which "would give a fuller rhythmus to the close of the entire passage," at the same time as it would knit the images together. Just so: the two things go together. Landor's verse never demands to be read aloud, nor does it profit

⁷De Quincey's *Literary Criticism*, ed. Darbishire, p. 164.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 261, 262.

from being so read. If he never sets up an interesting rhythm, it is for just the same reason that his images never reach out, one to another; no informing emotion welds parts into a whole. Coleridge's verdict strikes me as the last word on Landor, even at his best.

2

I come now to the *Hellenics*, and I shall not linger over them, because contrary to received opinion, they seem to me the weakest part of Landor's work. Here the hellenism is Theocritean, not Pindaric. In a note to *The Hamadryad*, Landor wrote, "Our hope is that it will be found of that order of simplicity which is simple in the manner of Theocritus." And Herford obligingly responds, "the *Hellenics* are the nearest English analogues of the Theocritean idylls." But as the Pindaric model leads into the English tradition of "strength," here, where Landor affects the pathetic instead of the sublime, the appropriate English context is the controversy carried on by Pope, Phillips and Purney, concerning simplicity and sweetness in the pastoral. The first consequence of Landor's efforts after idyllic sympathy is a sort of baby-talk colloquialism:

Heard of them I have:
Tell me some tale about them. May I sit
Beside thy feet? Art thou not tired? The herbs
Are very soft; I will not come too nigh;
Do but sit there, nor tremble so, nor doubt.
Stay, stay an instant: let me first explore
If any acorn of last year be left
Within it; thy thin robe too ill protects
Thy dainty limbs against the harm one small
Acorn may do. Here's none. Another day
Trust me: till then let me sit opposite.

Comment on this would be ribald. The carefully "rustic" colloquialism consorts very oddly with the still Latinate inversions ("Heard of them I have"). Surely Pope would have found this fully as namby-pamby as ever Ambrose Phillips was.

Not all the *Hellenics* are idylls. Included with them are such pieces as "Iphigeneia," "Helen and Meneloas," and "The Death of Artemidora," which, according to Herford again, "might be taken

for lost fragments of Greek tragedy, were they not touched with a certain modern tenderness for childhood and womanhood." These are the pieces esteemed most highly from among the *Hellenics*, and they seem to me the worst. Here the grand manner is aimed at the sob in the throat. The simplicity is meant to pierce the heart; instead it is embarrassing:

Iphigeneia, when she heard her doom
At Aulis, and when all beside the King
Had gone away, took his right-hand, and said,
"O father! I am young and very happy . . ."

This is from "Iphigeneia," singled out for praise by Herford and duly selected for Peacock's *English Verse*. We are meant, obviously, to think, "How gushing he might have been." But the famous "restraint" is so self-conscious and so laboured that it is only gush upside-down, a mirror-image just as mawkish as the excess it too sedulously avoids. As for "The Death of Artemidora," which Herford calls "the finest of all," it turns upon a piece of verbal "theatre" as slick and as soon exhausted as a wisecrack:

At that word, that sad word, joy,
Faithful and fond her bosom heav'd once more;
Her head fell back: and now a loud deep sob
Swell'd tho' the darken'd chamber; 'twas not hers.

I could not disagree with Herford more feverently than I do here. It is at this point that the Landorian manner becomes really vicious. It is stucco, hollow to the knock; but it is so slick and so striking that it can drive out of public taste the authentic pathos which it counterfeits, the true pastoral and pathetic simplicity of those *Lyrical Ballads* which Landor derided. We can see this happening, in fact, in Herford, who uses this "restraint" as a stick with which to belabour "The Idiot Boy."

3

It was, presumably, the principle of syntactical compactness which attracted Landor to the epigram. Here, as everyone knows the hellenism was that of the Greek Anthology. I have disclosed elsewhere my doubts about such pieces as the famous "I strove

with none." Once again, the restraint is only the other side of the sentimental coin, and the coin rings just as hollow. The longer epistle "To Eliza Lynn" is much more convincing as an apologia.

But I do not deny the distinction of the epigrammatic love-poems, and the slight but genuine pleasure they give. It is not easy however to define that distinction and that pleasure. The pleasure derives, I believe, from this: that no effort is made to infect the reader with heat or plangency. Landor does not attempt this, nor does he try to penetrate the structure or the development of the relationship between the lovers. The poems are unemotional and their meanings are conventional: and this derives from their function which Landor emphasizes more than once. They are votive tablets, plaques, or medallions, commemorating Ianthe, Ione, and the rest; hence, for instance, their rhythms, erect, easy and strenuous, resisting at all points the tendency to surge, to mount, accumulate, plunge and ebb. One element in the love-poem convention, the commemorative, here usurps all the rest.

It is this votive tablet effect, for instance, in "Rose Aylmer," that makes unacceptable the German critic's suggestion that "a life of memories and sighs" would be better than "a night . ." Certainly the hyperbole would not be out of place, but the sob in the throat would; plangency is as unwanted here as on a gravestone. Moreover, to promise to devote a whole life to Rose Aylmer's memory is to destroy all the ritual implications. The devotion of one night to Rose Aylmer's memory is a ritual act, as the devotion of two stanzas. And in this is implicit the recommendation of a whole way of life, by which the pain of life can be acknowledged without loss of dignity because the acknowledgement is part of a ritual order. All this is implicit in Landor, in the stiff conventional imagery and the stiff-legged rhythms, more than in what is said. In this attitude to life, especially to love, Landor resembles no-one among his contemporaries so much as Pushkin.

On this showing, the poem is a triumph of tact, keeping the strictest balance between public and private life. "Sceptred race," "form divine," "every virtue, every grace"—the point about these expressions, apparently so faded and callous, is that they come out of public life, soiled and rubbed smooth in the mouth of the orator.

That is, in this context, their virtue; for they thus stand over against the privacy of the personal name. The private experience is made public, and yet the poet has not immolated his own privacy and that of his women, on the altar of public lubricity or compassion. Byron and Shelly made poetry out of being private individuals much in the public eye; but in doing so they invited their readers to live vicariously at their expense, to pry into the private lives of Ravenna or Hampstead. Whether or not they intended this, does not matter. It happened, they could not stop it happening, and partly because of it they decided the poet was scapegoat, pariah and sacrificial victim. Landor too was very deliberately a private individual much in the public eye (unlike Dryden before, and Tennyson after, both acknowledged as public figures by virtue of their poetic function), yet he carried off that difficult role without sacrificing his own privacy.

The achievement of the poems to Ianthe and the others is thus a real one. But it is necessary to realise how precarious it is. One reason for this I have harped on already. Restraint is no virtue in itself; and even when it takes on significance, in the way outlined above, its effectiveness depends on our recognizing the unrestraint in the background. In this way the distinction is not the poem itself, but in the poem as compared with others. Related to this is the other serious flaw in this part of Landor's achievement: the whole effect depends on surprise and obeys the law of diminishing returns.

4

There remain the dramas, which I have left to the last because on these pieces rests any claim of Landor's on our serious attention, and any plea by his admirers that he has been unfairly neglected. These dramatic pieces were not intended for the stage, "being," said Landor, "no better than *Imaginary Conversations* in metre." This is less than fair to the best of them, to *Count Julian* and *The Siege of Ancona*. Certainly the former is too crabbed and obscure ever to be staged with success. The earliest of the dramas (1812), it suffers, as the heroic poems do, from falling apart into the units of which it is composed, in this case Marlovian "mighty

lines." This produces the short-breathed rhythms which distinguish Landon most plainly from his master Milton, and short-breathed images too, which remain stubbornly separate, side by side, individually striking but collectively chill. Moreover the verse suffers, as does does all dramatic blank-verse since Otway, from Shakespearean echoes which are frequently too powerful and too specific, so that Landon writes Shakespearean pastiche without knowing it. But this fault is not endemic as in *The Cenci* (which Landon admired and imitated), and the dramatic form saves Landon from attempting impossibly tight and Latinate syntax. *Count Julian* improves pretty steadily from a confused beginning, and is one of Landon's best works. Its theme, of a Spanish Coriolanus who revenges himself on his native land and its prince by assisting the Moorish invaders, embodies, I think, Landon's ambiguous attitude to the England of his day, which expelled him as it expelled Byron and Shelley, to the life of an expatriate.

Much better, and the best of all Landon's longer works, is *The Siege of Ancona*, written much later, which is, as Herford says, "a noble and stirring piece of 'heroic' tragedy." This is not quotable at all, except scene by scene. That is the measure of Landon's improvement; his verse here is bare and lucid without parading its own austerity, without contorting itself for the sake of a sounding line, a striking image, or a memorable attitude. I see no reason why it should not go upon the stage, and we owe it to Landon that some-one should make the attempt.

There is a surprising unanimity among the anthologists, about what represents Landon at his best. They all go for the epigrams. Even Pound chooses epigrams for *The A. B. C. of Reading*, and even Dr. Leavis thinks⁹ that if we are to read Landon at all, we should read the epigrams, with possibly some of the *Hellenics*. Anthologists with more space, like Peacock in his *English Verse* or H. S. Milford in *The Oxford Book of Regency Verse*, supplement the epigrams with "Iphigeneia," "Faesulan Idyll," and extracts from *Gebir*. To do Landon justice, the anthologist should

⁹F. R. Leavis. "Landon and the Seasoned Epicure." *Scrutiny*, Vol. XI no. 2, pp. 148-150.

present the dialogue between Julian and Hernando in Act IV, Scene 2, of *Count Julian*, and that between the consul and the archbishop in Act I, Scene 4, of the *Siege of Ancona*. But on the whole my sympathies are with Dr. Leavis when he implies that Landor deserves his neglect. Much the greater part of his work is the pretentious fabrication of the fluent amateur. The subjects are pegs on which to hang a style. There is certainly no call for a Landor revival today.

George Hemphill

Widow's Walk

Late August flaunts herself around the town.
The lights of cars
Below my window aim at permanence
Around the Bend, past Hackett's Corner and
The Slough, towards Franky's Place "Where Life Begins."
What glow we savored there before the war!
The drivers now are fuzzy boys, not you
Beyond the churchyard languishing in mist
Without its harvest like this summer night,
And I the huntress resting from the chase.
Soon frightened quarry will range out of sight
As ignorant as I am of the cause.
No more contented may I know the cause,
Or, nodding, listen for the mourning dove.

Do they mourn loss with those diminished thirds
Throaty and petulant upward?
And crickets fight with them and weave
The botched and unruly tatting of a widow's grief
That even now all maiden widows know.
Could I have been one of those silly girls
Twiddling dials, loving the dashlights' glow,
Offering a suckling shyly tiny pearls?
The earth stands still, but for the giddy whirls
A crazy bobbin through a shifting loom,
My mind's folly and wisdom in this room.

Paul bothered with the wildest things. "Suppose,"
He said on daddy's porch downstairs, "Suppose
A paratrooper beats me to the draw
And lands an hour or so before
My regiment on the beach. Would that destroy my pact?
What if I'm in the wrong platoon, or sick?
And what's the battle that will win the war?"

A child could make a fool of him, the kind
Whose quickest act, grown up, brings sleep and peace.
His letters in my closet in a box
Jumbled with shoes and dirty bobby socks
Contrive no comfort for a captive mind.
Where can the substance be of my release?

"You should have heard that cracker talk," he wrote,
"A skinny guy, a Bible nut, you see?
You should have heard the gurgle in his throat.
'You got it coming, boy, in Normandy.
Repent, repent, and fear the Lord,
Or you will shorely die, you mark my word.'
I told him I would buy the peace
Signed and delivered as I died
The first man on the beach. 'My boy, thet's pride
Atalkin now,' he said.
'Jehovah nor his Son
Aint closing deals like thet with nery one.'
Yes I will die (I didn't tell him this)
If only to confound the faith
That martyrs life for death.
At Bragg way back in '42 I first
Began to implement my boast;
And I will match with yours the beach's kiss."

What faith? For as he stood, ready to go
Away from me and to his foolish war,
Kissing, muttering nonsense, he stubbed his toe.
He ran shamefaced past daddy's sycamore
Dripping with summer rain. I saw him no more.
Absence since then is the old age of faith,
Unkempt, a sloven, going meanly dressed.
For the doves go; worms thrive in my breast;
With cloves and sherry I perfume my breath,
Courting in widowed bed mendacious rest,
For more than me at length I know
Like me he courted death.

Fall, falling, come and bring my love at last
Unbroken still in sleep, his body whole,
His hair alive, lids thick like mine for rest.
Conspire with us O Time, from pole to pole
Let cover of the earth upon us roll,
Hide from the sun and waking men our scheme.
Faithfully will we ever sleep and dream.

II

April's in France where I have never been.
Such chattering I've never heard
Least in the winter schoolroom of the mind.
This proves them funny foreign birds
Without the accent of our local jays,
Jawing at me against the dawn.
And then, half hiding its pink plaster,
See the snapdragons cluster
On a wall! at home I'd put them in a vase.
Where else but on a pastel street to find
One's own truelove? Waist locked in arm
Through a green corridor we go
South of—a pretty town—St. Valéry en Caux,
Where the soft press of branches stills the alarum,
And shades, where we walk, the hot glance of war.
Oh this, I know, this is what dreaming's for.
Downward, a gentle slope, we glide toward a spot
Planted with cisatlantic artifice
With creeping golfgreen grass.
“Here's where they say I'm buried, but I'm not,”
He said, and under us we saw
The breaking sea, to our love perpetual law.

“From where I came,” Paul said, “a bloody way,
Soldiers in lazy circles sit around
Complaining idly of the food, the pay,
The terrain of Hell, the women there, what wound

One got at Cannae or Concord, or those found
Among the dying off Gallipoli.
I was the new recruit from Normandy.
The closest thing to that I ever knew
Were the tent cities and bivouacs back home:
The food carrots with raisins, swimming stew,
The talk the same in Fayetteville and Rome
About what each had been, and would become
After the war, and loud boasts to allay
Strong hopes and fears of girls less chaste than they.
I kept my peace, but learned just why
I had to die
From the oldest martial resident of Hell.
His name I didn't catch, at Troy he fell.
'The two of us,' he said, 'made one mistake;
We died, unwitting, for a green girl's sake'."

"Oh Paul has lost," I heard me cry
"Life and the hope of life, the furrow,
The stripling shoot, the bird and his song."
He answered softly, "None of this is so,"
And no more for an hour did we speak
Except in languages too low for waking
Ears to tell the sentries of that place.
There never was a sacred embrace.

I quieted. "Paul, you were never made
Rashly to accomplish wholesale death, or prove
Your hardiness in quick assault, or raid,
Or sly patrols that toward the unwary move;
Your strength is on the littler field of love,
Where you, since I am not your enemy,
Accomplish my destruction easily."
He stood and yawned, dressed in the worn
And faded green pajamas of that war.
No real bridegroom rose so jauntily
While coolness trembled on the sheet.

My eyes,
Like suns too light with pain, slash at the mist
Swirling around his feet.

Sleep-tossed,
My arms encounter them until he says,
Firmly as husbands should: "Diana, wake,
And welcome for my sake
The sturdy dawn."
And then though he had gone
I heard the world: no jay or dove was there,
But classic cardinal told his triplets to the air.

III

My lucky father in his wisdom made
A roomy house of stone, with gingerbread
For girls, a catwalk for his boys.
It is as if I walked
Too high and too precarious above
This town, and talked
With Paul who has no need of love.

Therefore follow the river below that house,
Still nourishing the graveyard of the town,
A realist of the light of common day.
My name's the moon
But she will never see me here or swoon
In fatuous connivance with her spouse.

For here Paul lies and here I honor him,
Not in the flattering truth of a dream
Illumined by the treachery of the moon,
But in this place, this township, at high noon.

I've married and divorced a ghost.
It's harder to make friends with earth, as widows should,
Nourishing resurrection where my tears are shed.
Look there how a cloud, scudding from the east,
Shielding the peaceful land, hastens to join
Its tribute with the river's and with mine.

Ezra Pound

TWO INCIDENTS

[The first of these three letters from Ezra Pound to W. B. Yeats explains the aim and technique of Pound's anthology *Profile*, published at Milan in 1932. Like everything Pound has done the anthology had a clearly stated purpose, to which several original editorial procedures were adjusted.

The other two letters should be read in conjunction with that to Felix E. Schelling on page 98 of Pound's published *Letters*, and those to Harriet Monroe on pages 235 and 237. The letter to Simon Guggenheim on page 196 is also relevant. It should perhaps be noted that in the present letters no offense was aimed at Guggenheim the endower, but at the administrators of the foundation.

Pound was demanding the institution of subsidies for writers doing their own work, not merely research into the past, forty years ago (*Patria Mia*). He sold this idea to Max Pam in Italy well before the Guggenheim foundation was set up. Pam was one of the men from whom John Quinn extracted money for printing one year of *The Little Review*; but the money went to Margaret Anderson for the printer's bill, not to Pound for contributors.

The letters were located in Dublin by Mr. Donald R. Pearce, through whose courtesy and their author's they are here printed.]

I

Via Marsala, 12 int. 5
Rapallo
24 Jan. 1931

Dear W. B. Y.

I enc. a letter from Harriet.

Re the following: I want the "Bald Heads" and one or two later poems if possible. Read what follows.

[The following announcement was enclosed.]

G. Scheiwiller of Milan prints limited edns. of good books (on Modigliani and other topics) on which he regularly loses a small sum of the small income he earns as a clerk to Hoepli. He has asked me to make him an anthology of 20th century poetry American and English. There is no money in it for anyone. The company will be select, and I shall indicate the relative age of the work.

The only use it can be to you will be in orienting a few of the better Italian writers, for example the groups about Indice and Circoli are beginning to substitute english for french, or at least to include it in their concept of contemporaneity.

Sch. plans to print only 200 copies (I rather want him to do 200 exclusive of the 50 to be given to the contributors, I suppose 2 each to about 30 writers . . .) At any rate there won't be more than 260 printed, so it ought not to interfere with other sales of yr/ poesy. The book might also help to discover whether there is the chance for a continental sale of something better than Tauchnitz.

I want this to serve for contemporary english somewhat as my french number of Little Rev. served in U.S.A. for introd. of french of that period.

[End of announcement.]

If there is trouble re/ anthology fee (I mean lack of it) I cd. do with the "Bald Heads."

BUT as introd. to young Italy it might be better to be more free and easy.

I am going to avoid the usual anthology injustice BY printing things in periods. The minor brothers who hit it once and once only will appear at their DATE; those who develop over a period of several decades will be shown by stages once every ten years or so.

As I am making a running comment, I don't absolutely NEED permission, but I don't intend to take poems against the will of their authors.

yrs. ever

E.P.

II

Via Marsala 12-5

Rapallo

3 Jan. [?1932]

Dear WILLIAM

Old Harriet has got some "foundation" to pay her bill for the year.

With a little discreet pushing, the Gugg. might be induced to subsidize it permanently.

The old girl wants to stop the rag with her own decease or anility, but I don't think she need be let do that.

As the Gugg. always guesses WRONG, ole G. wd. himself secure his immortality (up till the revolution) better by paying a printer's bill.

My name should NOT appear in the plot. But if you and Eliot stuck yr/ names on an advisory committee (with no obligation to advise), some sort of decent succession to office word cd. be devised. The present sub/edtr/ can be guided, and Marianne Moore wd. be a suitable person to whom Moe and President AydemNOT could not publicly object.

The amount of two scholarships wd. run the rag/ and with a little good will it cd. again be made useful as it was in 1912 to 1914, for hand outs to the more deserving.

There is some prospect of their dividing the contents into three sections / one for mature work like ours.

One for men of promise and one for toddling tinies.

—The only possible objections are bureaucratic objections and cd. be raised only by the natural malevolence of professors and their ineradicable hate of poetry.

Basil is getting on with study of Persian and deep in Firdusi.

Appy noo year and merry retrospective Xmas

E.P.

III

via Marsala 12-5
Rapallo
9 March [?1932]

Dear William

I think I can guarantee you against any complications/ all I am trying to do, is as usual to get food into the mouths of the few writers who deserve to EAT

1.

All you need do is to sign the enclosed (or have G. type out something similar).

2.

Agree to let Poetry print a few poems ON CONDITION of their trying to improve.

3.

Allow your name to appear on a respectable advisory committee ON CONDITION that no letters be sent you.

Your functions as advisor being limited to advice you give voluntarily without external stimulus. And which cd. remain ZERO.

IF you happened to want them to print new stuff by known or unknown irish, yr. forwarding it wd. assure its immediate perusal.

All of which wd. happen in any case.

The aim being to get a permanent subsidy from the Guggenheim for the magazine, i.e. transpose two or three of their fellowships which are now almost invariably given to the wrong people/ or at any rate INVARIABLY NOT given to the best writers.

At any rate it wd. mean distributing the cash where writers think best instead of where professors fail to think at all, being by nature alien to any such process.

You can stick a date and address on the enclosed if you consent.

Yrs.,

E.

For the sake of clarity I now cease writing so as not to complicate this letter by extraneous matter.

MY NAME can't appear until Guggenheim has been dealt with, as I have explained Guggenheim to Guggenheim.

[*Enclosed*]

Dear Ezra

I have no objection to sending a manuscript to Poetry if they seriously attempt to improve their general contents.

I do not mind signing their application for Guggenheim or other endowment funds if they make it.

I would even consent to the use of my name on an advisory committee if it made no demands on my time and were organized in a satisfactory manner.

Jamie de Angulo

Recognition

The lily in the pond bloomed last night;
I have waited three years!
red fish in the pool, red fish in the pool;
you never warned me.

COMMUNICATION

April 24, 1953

Dear Mr. Carter,

I am *sorry* not to help, supposing what I wrote might be a help. I enclose a poem Jamie de Angulo wrote (to me) when I was making an effort to get the Viking Press to publish the *Indian Tales*. It may not supplement well material you had thought of using, of course. I am merely catching at a straw, to be in some sense of use to you. I am indeed enthusiastic about the *Tales* and about Don Gregorio—especially Don Gregorio (in *Nine*) and the drawings for the *Indian Tales*. You have on the jacket of the *Tales* what I said to Mr. Wyn.*

In writing the Whitney Foundation for assistance in publishing the tales, I said what is mild but what is as follows:

As I see it, there is health in the work; it is entertaining (to me) and, as an untainted contribution to ethnology, is rare, in my experience.

I am tempted to try to comment on the *Tales* but must not.

Sincerely yours,

Marianne Moore

*"I am charmed by the book—text and pictures. It is no effort, of course, to be pleased by the sure touch—stories and animal drawings that are poetry, innate, humor-born, and wise." From the jacket of *Indian Tales* by Jamie de Angulo. A. A. Wyn, 1953.

Thomas H. Carter

THE TOTEM WITH NO FACE

In America, the age of anxiety and aspirin has become an age of supreme self-consciousness: we have even got into the habit of looking behind us to see what our shadows are doing. To sensibilities jaded by the atom bomb, normal sensation cannot be made to yield much excitement—finally even sex has its limitations; insensitive to gratuitous thrills, we consider cynically our monolithic culture and wonder about the flaws on and under its rigid surface. Are we, we ask ourselves, living on the edge of some sort of crack-up? If so, it is our duty as solid citizens and good masochists to insist on knowing as much about the process as possible. We beg a key to our cultural landscape, preferably a simplified one.

This attitude, I imagine, has been to some extent the cause of the popularity of such anthropological reports as *Male and Female* by Miss Mead as well as Mr. David Reisman's study of the categories of popular culture discussed in *The Lonely Crowd*. That these books are useful to the social sciences is undeniable, but they likewise serve as a sort of distorted mirror for our narcissistic impulses.

For the purpose of this note, I should like to present one possible key and two texts. As working hypothesis, I suggest simply that the folklore of a people may serve as an index to the health of the culture in which it operates. My first text is a remarkable book called *The Mechanical Bride*¹ by Herbert Marshall McLuhan; its subtitle is "folklore of industrial man."

His subtitle has reference to what he calls the collective consciousness or dream of most of the members of American society; this dream does not arise directly from the "folk" but from the laboratory, the studio, and the advertising agencies. His book consists of a series of exhibits culled from modern advertising

¹THE MECHANICAL BRIDE. By Herbert Marshall McLuhan. The Vanguard Press, 1951. \$4.50.

followed by his own comments; his purpose is to "place" the reader in the center where the dream is manufactured so that he can judge it, as opposed to unconsciously accepting it.

In his Preface, Mr. McLuhan recalls Poe's sailor protagonist of "A Descent into the Maelstrom," who because of his *detachment* is able to regard the situation with *amusement*. It becomes obvious that Mr. McLuhan is a sly fellow, since he offers his book as an amusement got up by a detached individual. This is, of course, not so; *The Mechanical Bride* is an amusing work but it is also an indignant work; Mr. McLuhan may well be as detached as can be humanly expected, but despite his sophistication, his wide range of reading, his perceptive power, and his wit, he is a thoroughly disgusted man.

My second text, equally important, is the *Indian Tales*² of Jamie de Angulo, an anthropologist who lived forty years among the Pit River Indians of California. In a sense, *Indian Tales* represents the same kind of work as that done by Miss Mead; there are glimpses of fertility rites and puberty initiation rituals, but it is just at such times that I find the book least interesting.

Indian Tales, I should make clear, is probably more important for literature than for anthropology; there are many competent dedicated anthropologists, but a person of the late Mr. de Angulo's special qualities is not often to be found in that field. The book is set in that prehistoric time when there were animal-people, its framework is the journey of a family, and it is made up of Indian folklore: details of family life, translations of Indian stories, origin myths, and so on. By use of his skeletal pilgrimage, Mr. de Angulo has managed to tell what he knows of the ethnic qualities of his Indians. To put it bluntly, Mr. de Angulo's book is as much the work of a poet—I should note the beautiful rhythmic structure of his prose—as it is that of a scientist; just as Mr. McLuhan's book is the work of a critic of the arts as much as it is that of a critic of society.

It is, after all, with culture that we are concerned, and it is perhaps time we got back to it. The chief—indeed, almost only—test

²INDIAN TALES. By Jamie de Angulo. A. A. Wyn, 1953. \$3.75.

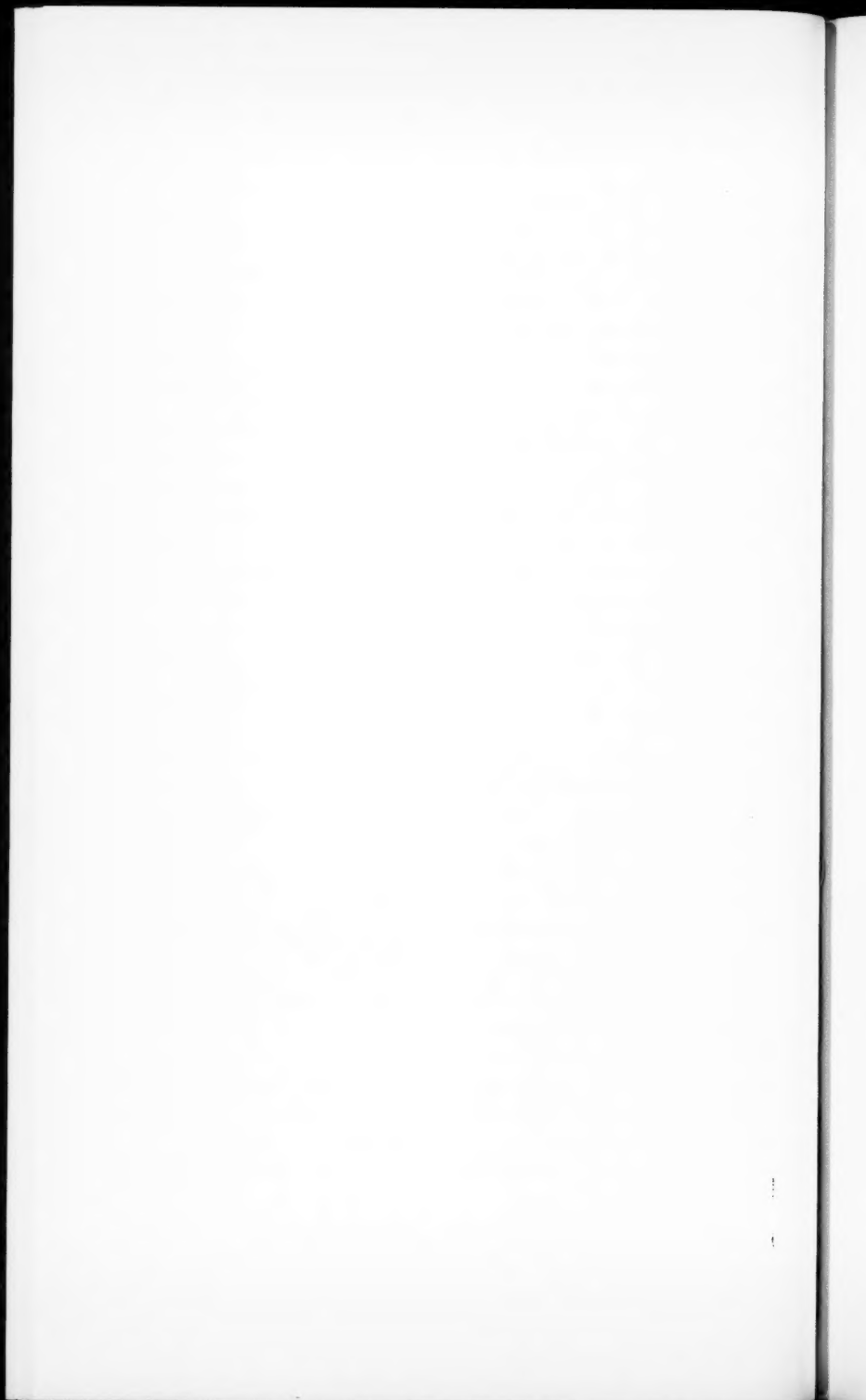
of a culture is that it provide sufficient "satisfaction" to a sufficient number of its members to hold it together. When enough individuals object to a certain culture for a long enough time, it must blow up, sometimes with fourth of July noises, more often from sheer lassitude. The point about the culture of the Pit River Indians is its consistency and its high degree of attainable satisfaction; its folklore was an organic outgrowth of its activities, largely hunting and pastoral in nature. It is true that the average Indian had no more idea of the real nature of creation than we do, but this did not bother him much. Maybe Silver Fox *thought* the world into existence out of a nebulous cloud, maybe he did not; in the meantime, there were rabbits to hunt.

The high degree of "adjustment" found in this "primitive" culture may well serve as a point of reference in regard to the high degree of maladjustment that disrupts American society. I have said that Mr. McLuhan is indignant about the folklore of industrial man. He is indignant, I think, because that folklore—the only kind possible to a segmented society—is so patently *phony*.

The Mechanical Bride is an important work because, in Mr. McLuhan's words, "Ours is the first age in which many thousands of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full time business to get inside the collective public mind." Mr. McLuhan's work is more valuable, say than *The Lonely Crowd*, because while Mr. Reisman studies a limited number of individuals and generalizes, Mr. McLuhan presents his exhibits and allows the reader to draw the final conclusion—one that is thoroughly frightening. Mr. McLuhan's detachment of mind is of the same general order as that of Wyndham Lewis; his indignation is moral rather than personal. I regret, parenthetically, that Mr. McLuhan has failed to consider one of the fastest-growing types of modern advertising, namely, the religious. We are confronted daily with a neon cross which reads horizontally "Jesus," erectly, "Saves." Comforted by this assurance, we are not too put out when we learn from every third billboard that "You Need Jesus Today." No doubt. But this Jesus is no organic necessity of society; he is an abstraction posited by the same advertising methods that assure us we can find a home away from home in the sanctity and safety of the new deluxe Ford automobile.

This folklore of fake, fostered by an accepted industrialism, results in technology, a confusion of ends and means. It takes America's depest interest—sex—and robs it of its sexual quality. "The mechanical bride," product of advertising and industry to whom we are wedded, is a perfect horror. She buys her clothes to preserve her *chic*; she wears a corset to control her figure—no wonder her smile is strained; her breasts and legs are depersonalized, they are objects for display, so that she may, according to the best ideals of industrialism, sell herself. She is, in short, herself a fragmented product of a fragmented society.

A striking point about de Angulo's Indians is their complete lack of totems as such; but *we* have many of these—the car, the engine, the steamship. We must have the totem in which to inclose ourselves because we dare not stand without it. Is it, then, going too far to suggest that our marriage to the mechanical bride is but one step to further retrogression—the desire to secrete ourselves safely in a mechanical womb?



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